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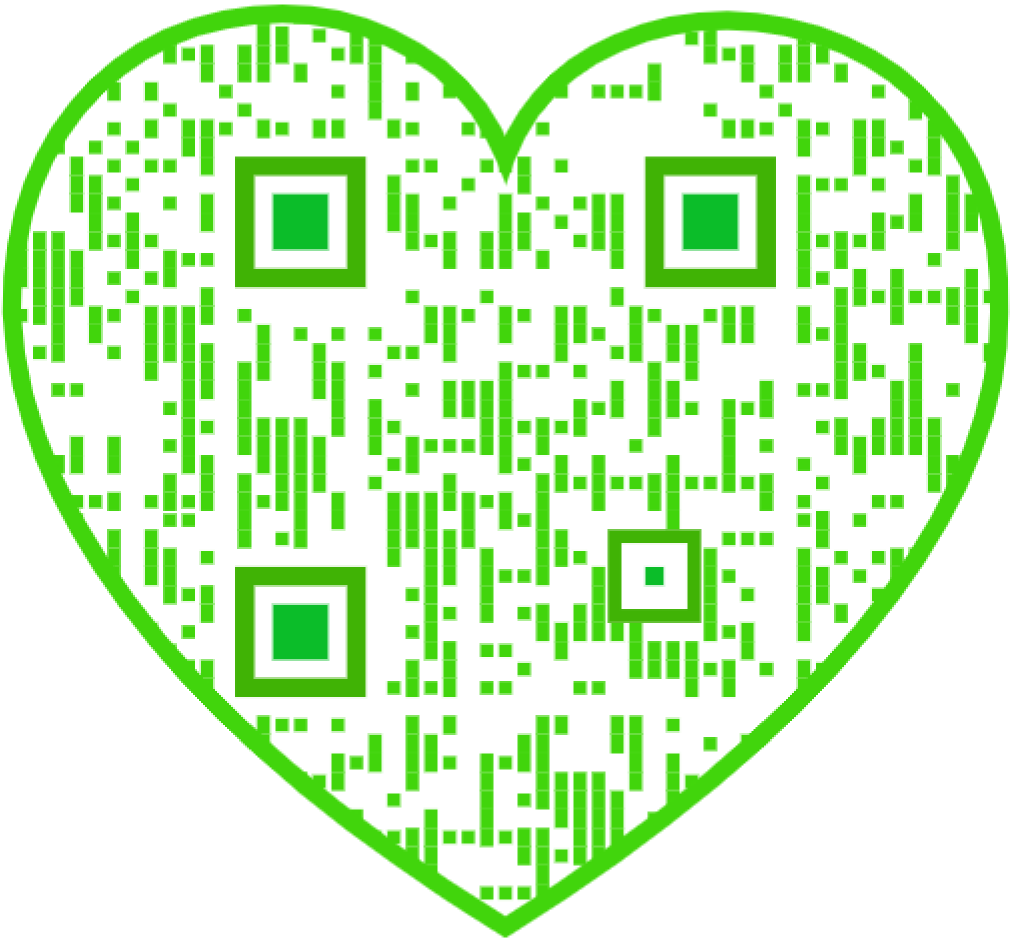

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Welcome to April

While spring is at its glorious peak right now – and I adore the colour, vibrancy and new life the season has to offer – I also love how it's a time to look ahead to summer. I don't want to wish the year away, but I do find it exciting to imagine the long days and warmer temperatures that are on the horizon. The good times in the garden are coming up!

Best of all, there are plenty of things we can do in the garden now that will create results come summer. Whether it's starting off veggies, adding new plants to borders or sowing flowers, so much of what we do now will make our gardens all the better in the not-too-distant future. And that's the bit I find so satisfying: there's a little waiting, watching and nurturing to do between now and summer, but not too much.

At the top of my 'jobs for summer' list is planting dahlia tubers. It's something I've always done, and I love how the dry, somewhat ugly, tubers transform into beautiful blooms with very little skill required on my part. There are obviously a few things to get right but, overall, if you plant and water dahlia tubers they will grow and bloom – job done.

This year I plan to grow dahlias to use as cut flowers (in the patch I've dedicated to our **Make a Metre Matter** campaign) and, ideally, I'm looking for single-flowered varieties that will support pollinators. So I was delighted to see several suitable candidates in our roundup of new dahlias from page 67, and already have my eye on the rather lovely looking 'Lemon Sherbet'.

What takes your fancy from our dahlia selection? Do let us know, and don't forget to share your results on our socials come summer – we love seeing how you're getting on. But until then, enjoy the moment and happy gardening.

Kevin

Kevin Smith, Editor
@kevinsmithgarden

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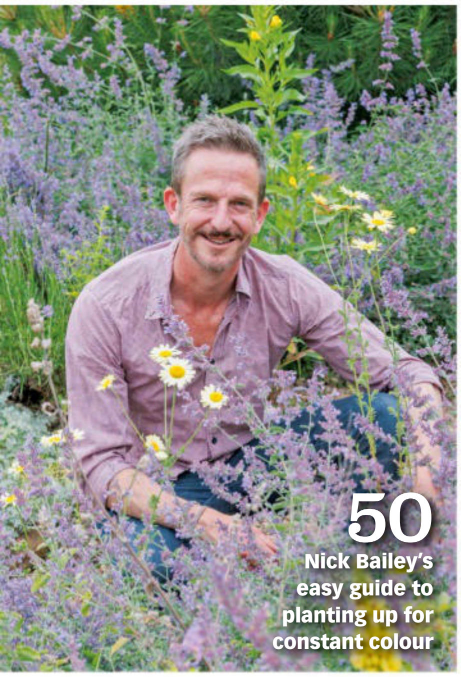

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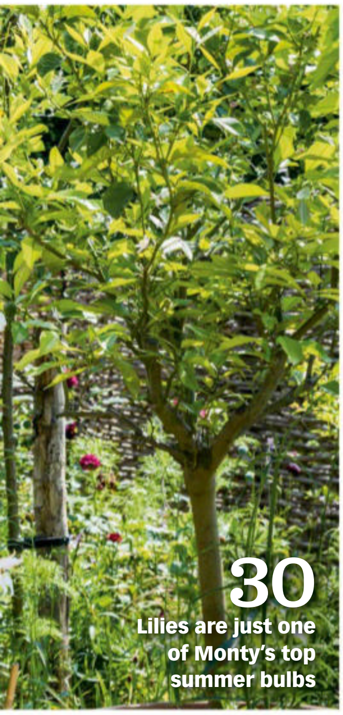

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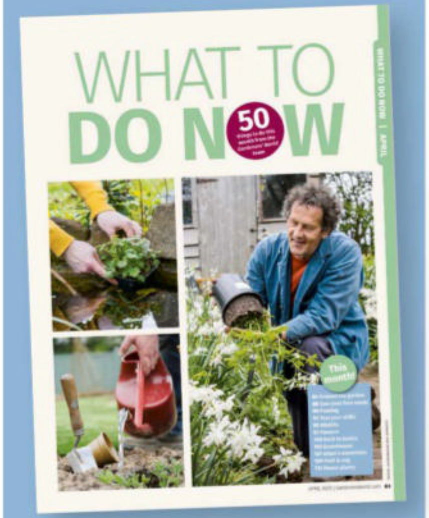

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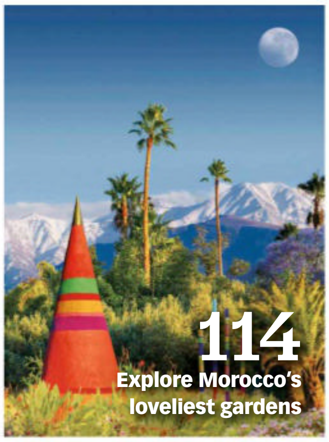

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On the cover

***Dahlia* 'Bettina Verbeek', photo by Getty/Alex Manders**

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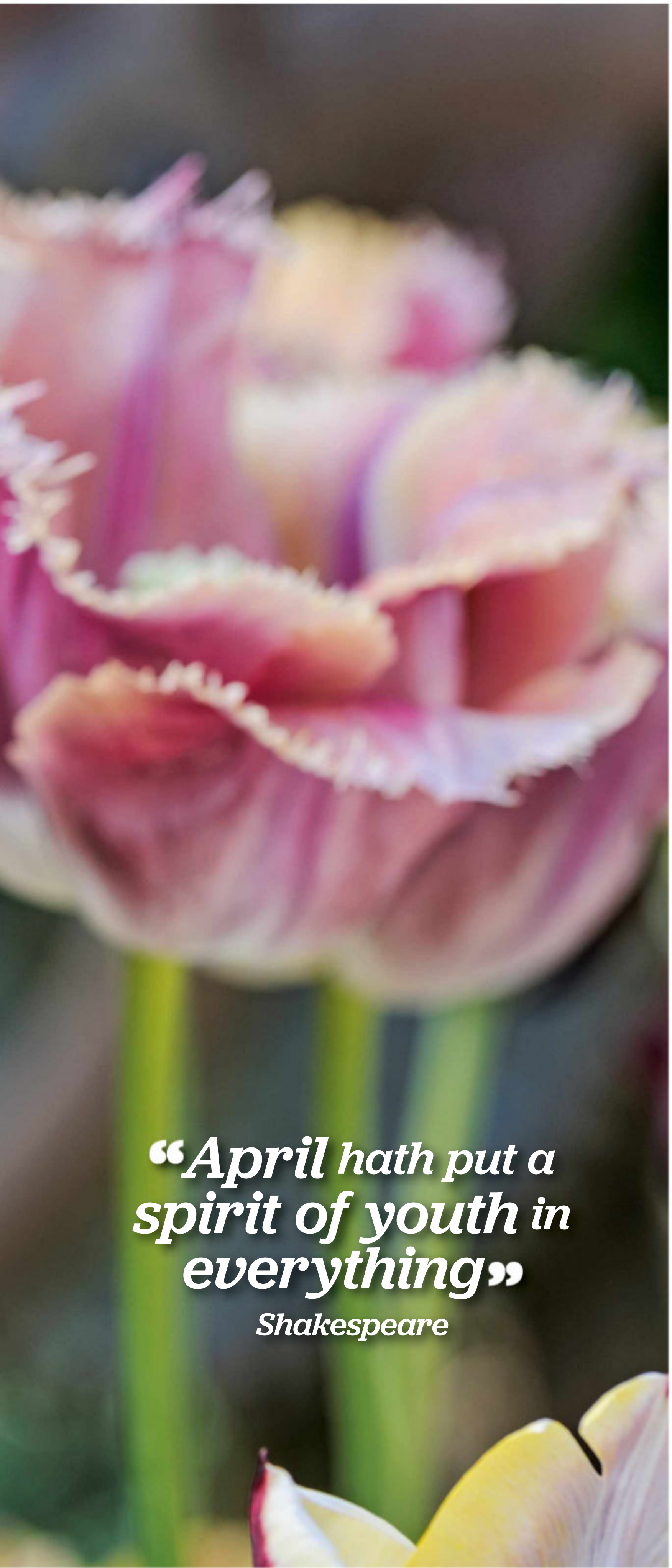
PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM; ALEX MANDERS; SUZY STOCKL; STREETFLASH

We love April

In idle moments, I have sometimes thought about skydiving. I like the idea of plummeting earthwards, feeling the comforting jolt of a deploying canopy and the serenity of drifting over rolling countryside. I have not (yet) got round to it and, sadly, my time may be running out. Why am I talking about skydiving? Because of the moment when you are standing in the open door of an aeroplane, your heart in your mouth and with a feeling of trepidation. That moment is just like April – ahead of you is all the anticipation and excitement of summer. All you need to do is jump...

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR



“April hath put a spirit of youth in everything”

Shakespeare

STAR OF THE MONTH

Tulipa 'Sunset Miami'

Lots of us spent many happy hours last autumn salivating over bulb catalogues. Most gardeners I know overestimate the size of their gardens, get carried away and tend to order far too many bulbs. Then comes the reckoning: you ordered them, now you have to get out there and find enough space in the garden to plant them all! Every available pot and border is called into service and, at last, they are all in place. Next, we have a few months of worrying about squirrels but, around about now, it all comes good and your garden is drenched in colour.

Plant in late autumn after the first cold snap. Make sure that they are not buried too shallow and that the soil is free draining. **Height x Spread** 40cm x 10cm

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

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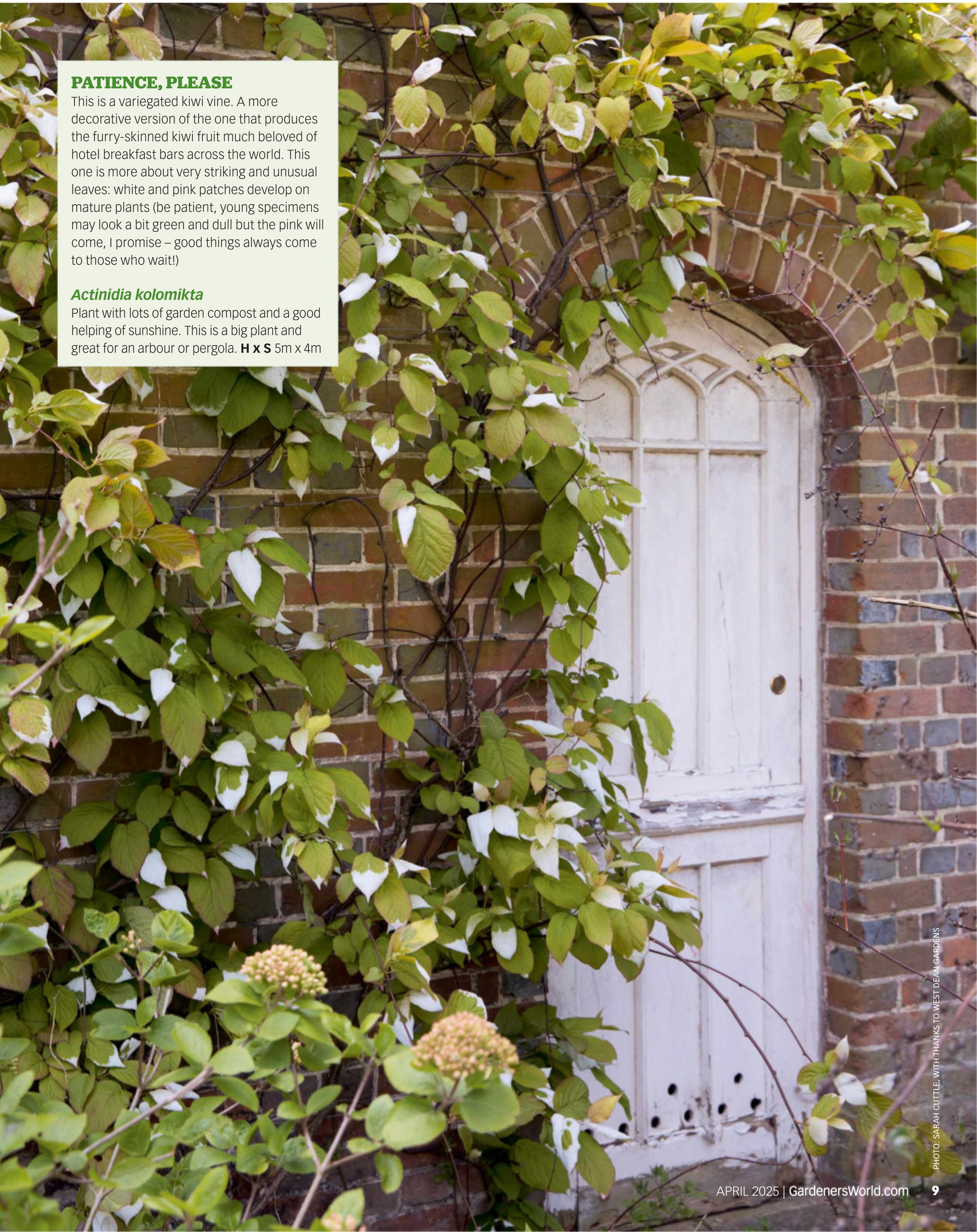


PATIENCE, PLEASE

This is a variegated kiwi vine. A more decorative version of the one that produces the furry-skinned kiwi fruit much beloved of hotel breakfast bars across the world. This one is more about very striking and unusual leaves: white and pink patches develop on mature plants (be patient, young specimens may look a bit green and dull but the pink will come, I promise – good things always come to those who wait!)

Actinidia kolomikta

Plant with lots of garden compost and a good helping of sunshine. This is a big plant and great for an arbour or pergola. **H x S** 5m x 4m

PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE, WITH THANKS TO WEST DEAN GARDENS

CHECK IT OUT

Why are these little darlings called snake's head fritillaries? I think that the chequerboard petals are a much more striking feature than the pointiness of the flowerheads. Just a suggestion, but how would you feel if we renamed them? Maybe gambit fritillaries or Sicilian defence fritillaries as a bit of a chess homage. Sadly, I fear that I have little influence in these things but it is always good to dream!

Fritillaria meleagris

Plant bulbs in autumn – as many as you can manage. Happy in damp (but not waterlogged) clay soil. Watch out for flower-munching pheasants!
H x S 30cm x 5cm

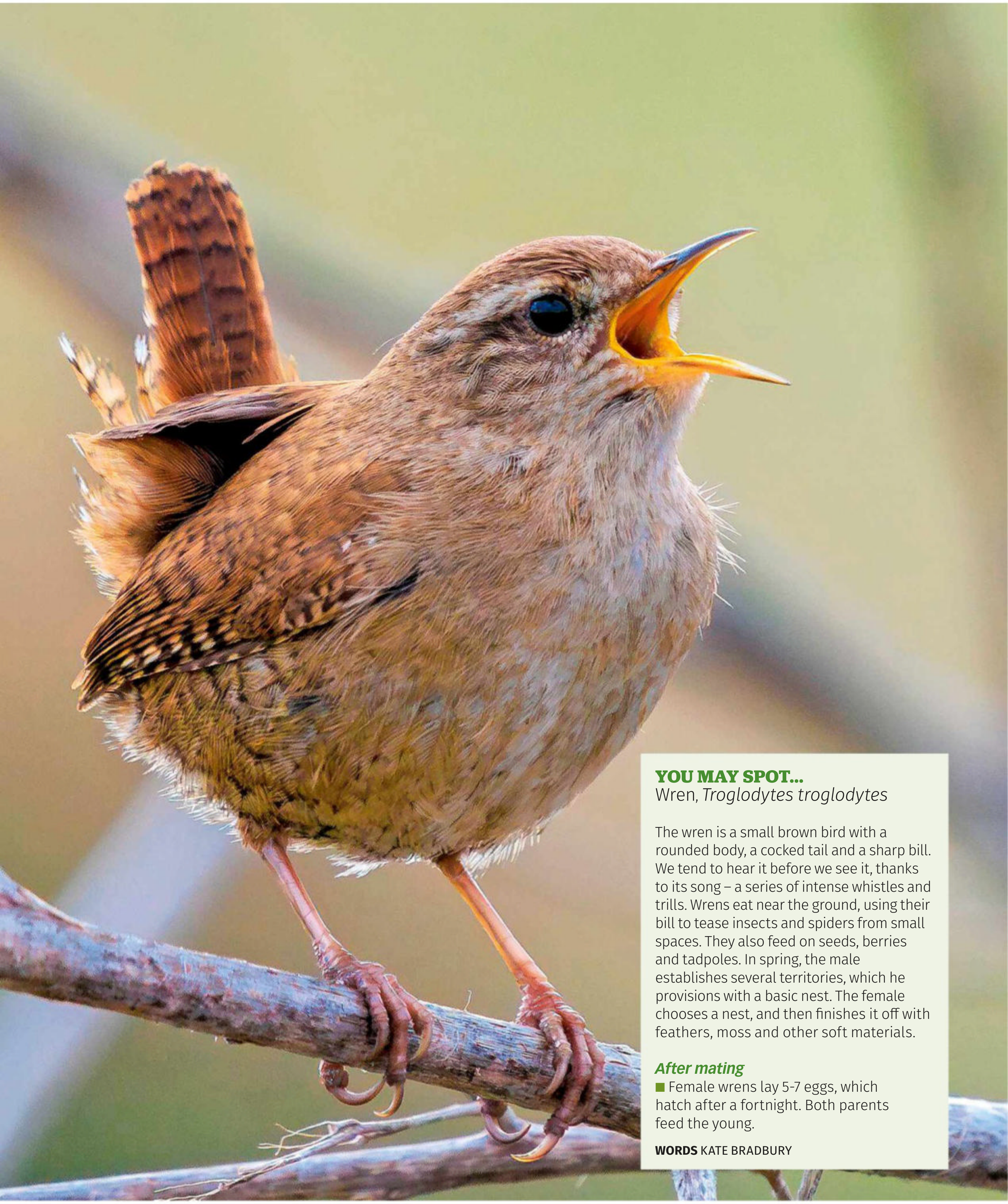
CREAM OF THE CROP

The name is a trifle discombobulating because, as you can see here, it is a very pretty top-of-the-milk creamy colour rather than ivory, which one associates with blushing brides and the gleaming teeth of Hollywood superstars. Still, we easily forgive such slips when the result is this good. Easily grown from seed, sweet scented, long flowering and (as if that was not enough) great in a vase as a cut flower.

Erysimum cheiri 'Ivory White'

Sow under glass from December to April. Will self seed if you go easy on the harvesting and deadheading.
H x S 45cm x 30cm

PHOTOS: ALAMY/SANDER MEERTINS; SARAH CUTTLE, WITH THANKS TO WEST DEAN GARDENS



YOU MAY SPOT...

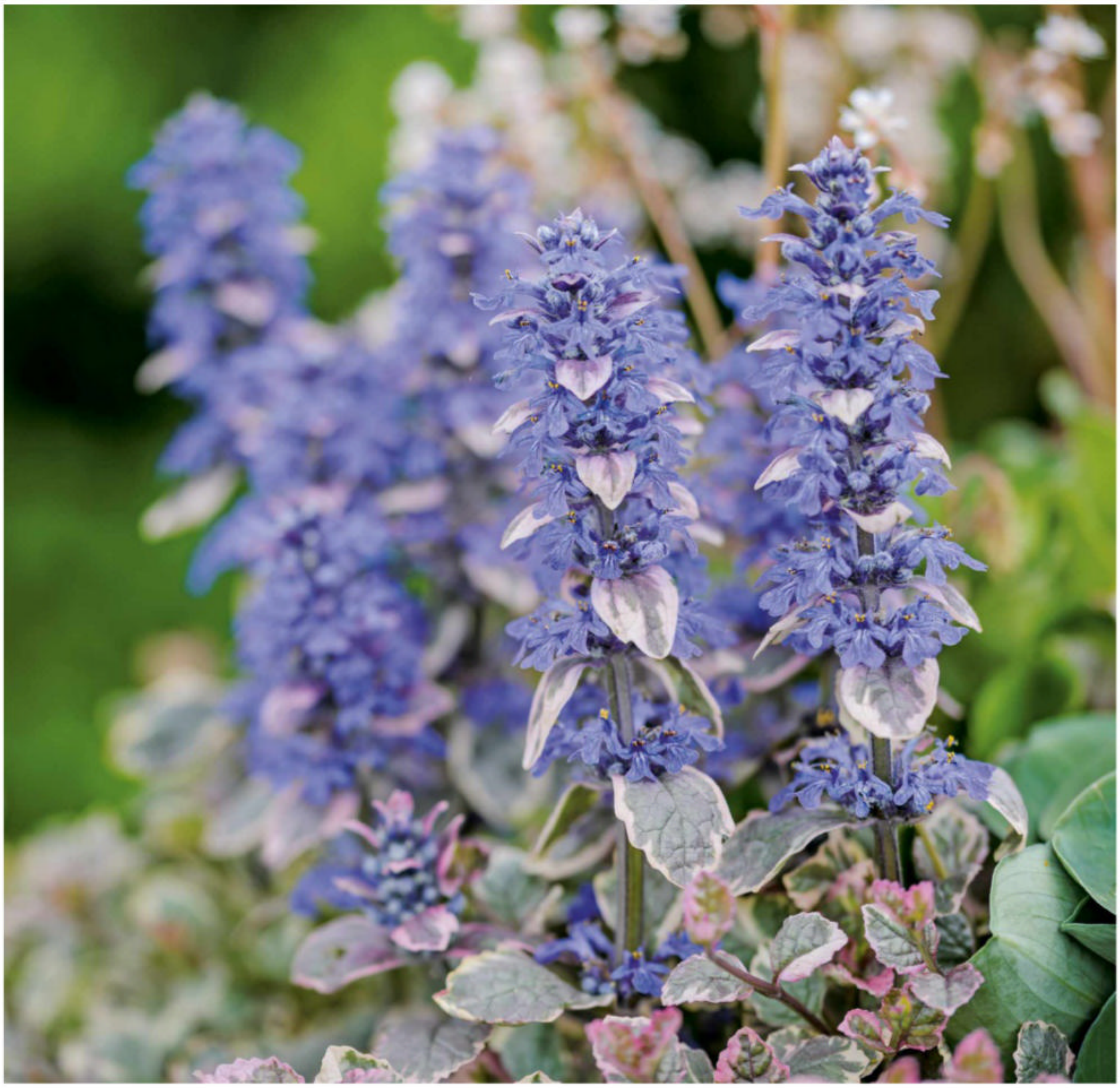
Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*

The wren is a small brown bird with a rounded body, a cocked tail and a sharp bill. We tend to hear it before we see it, thanks to its song – a series of intense whistles and trills. Wrens eat near the ground, using their bill to tease insects and spiders from small spaces. They also feed on seeds, berries and tadpoles. In spring, the male establishes several territories, which he provisions with a basic nest. The female chooses a nest, and then finishes it off with feathers, moss and other soft materials.

After mating

- Female wrens lay 5-7 eggs, which hatch after a fortnight. Both parents feed the young.

WORDS KATE BRADBURY



PLANT UP A POT...

A trio of tulips

Tulips are all about pops of colour and in this big, galvanised tub for a sunny spot, I've matched three plants each of vibrant *Tulipa* 'Sarah Raven' with rich, velvety 'Ridgedale' and bright, fresh 'Spring Green'. To offset and highlight their colours even further, I've included a zesty *Mathiasella bupleuroides* 'Green Dream', with chartreuse-green bracts. As well as being super long-flowering, its upright habit ensures it doesn't overcrowd the tulip flowers. The silver tone of the planter makes the colours ping out and the compost is deep enough to sustain the Mathiasella all year, plus there's room for an understory clump of *Melica altissima* 'Alba'. Position the container in its final spot before you start planting, as once filled it will be heavy and difficult to move. When the tulips open, water the container every 2-3 days to keep them flowering for as long as possible.

WORDS LUCY BELLAMY

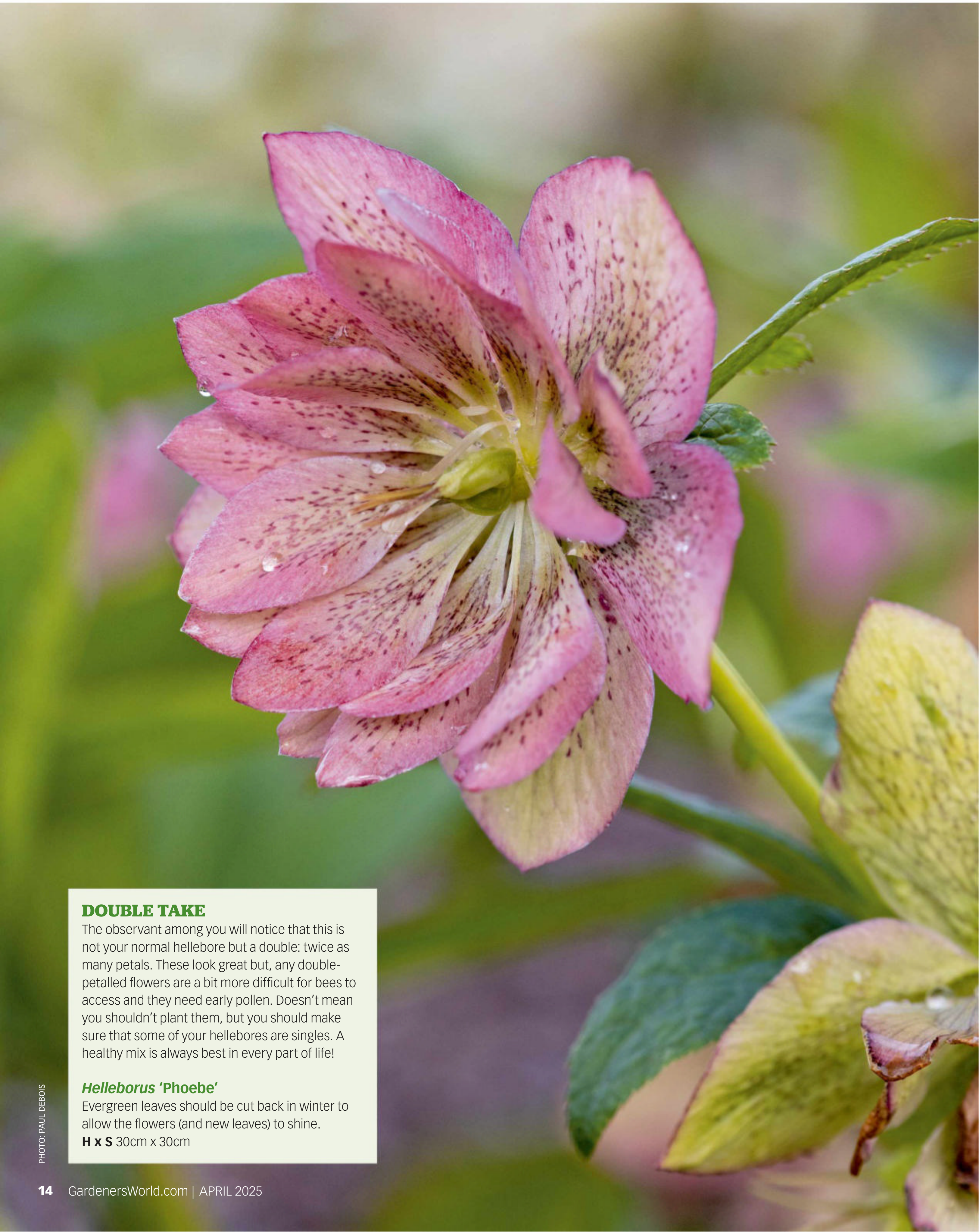
PRETTILY DEPENDABLE

This is a properly reliable old trooper: a plant that is happy in a bit of shade and impervious to all pests and diseases. It has been bred from the common or garden *Ajuga reptans*, which you will probably know best as a wildflower that romps around damp grassland, and also adds a bit of texture and variety to your lawn – much better for nature and wildlife than a perfect grass-only sward.

Ajuga reptans 'Burgundy Glow'

Evergreen with winey splodges and pale leaf margins. Excellent ground cover. Divide in spring. **H x S** 15cm x 6cm

AJUGA WORDS: JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR
PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM



DOUBLE TAKE

The observant among you will notice that this is not your normal hellebore but a double: twice as many petals. These look great but, any double-petalled flowers are a bit more difficult for bees to access and they need early pollen. Doesn't mean you shouldn't plant them, but you should make sure that some of your hellebores are singles. A healthy mix is always best in every part of life!

***Helleborus* 'Phoebe'**

Evergreen leaves should be cut back in winter to allow the flowers (and new leaves) to shine.

H x S 30cm x 30cm

PHOTO: PAUL DEBOIS

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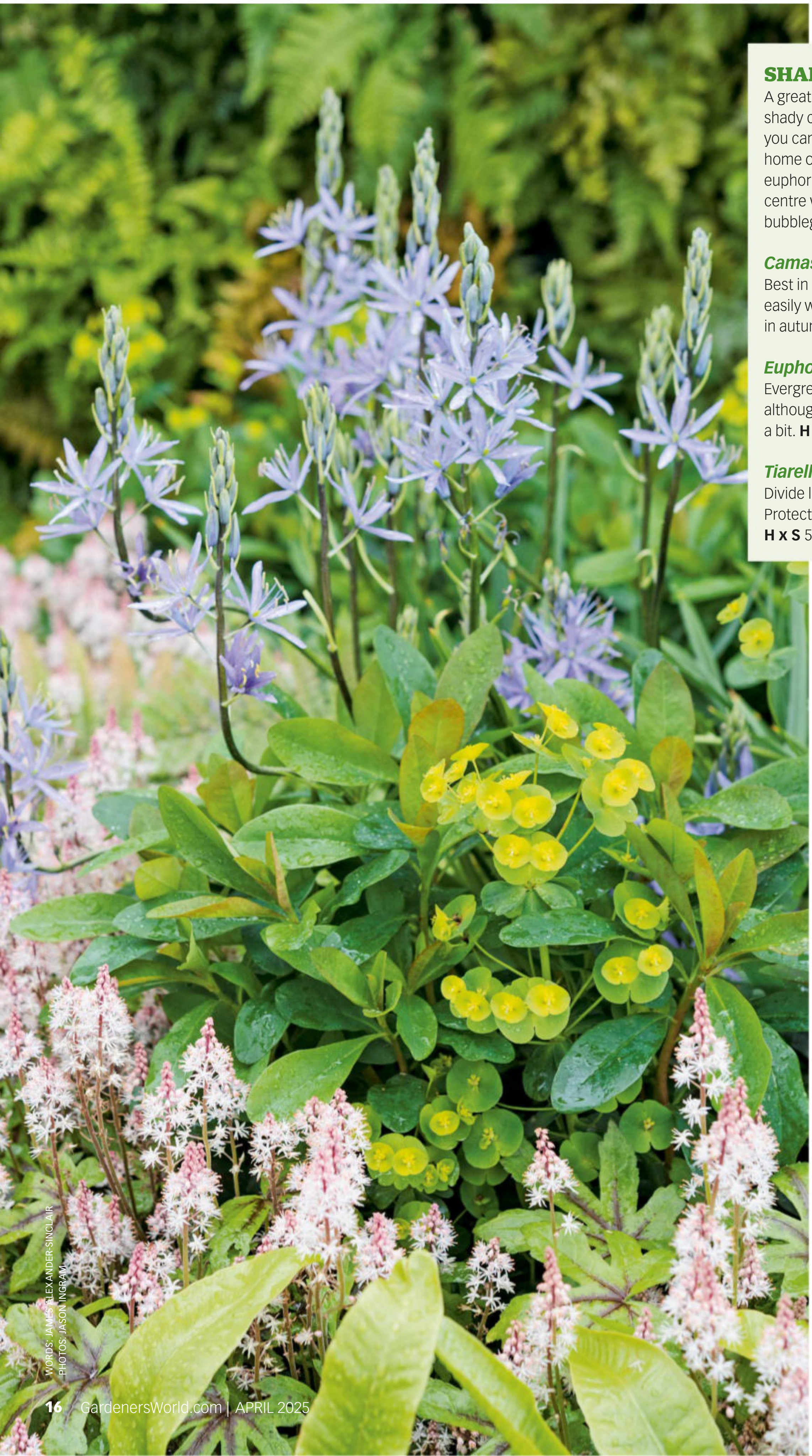


SHADY LADIES

A great, well-balanced combination for a shady corner, ideally near a path where you can stumble across it while coming home or heading to the compost. The euphorbia gives it a solid evergreen centre while the camassias and tiarella's bubblegum-pink froth make it dance.

Camassia leichtlinii 'Caerulea'

Best in sun or semi-shade but copes easily with a heavy clay soil. Plant bulbs in autumn. **H x S** 1m x 10cm

Euphorbia amygdaloides

Evergreen. Excellent in a dark corner although if too happy may well spread a bit. **H x S** 50cm x 50cm

Tiarella 'Spring Symphony'

Divide larger plants in springtime. Protect from excessive winter rain. **H x S** 50cm x 50cm

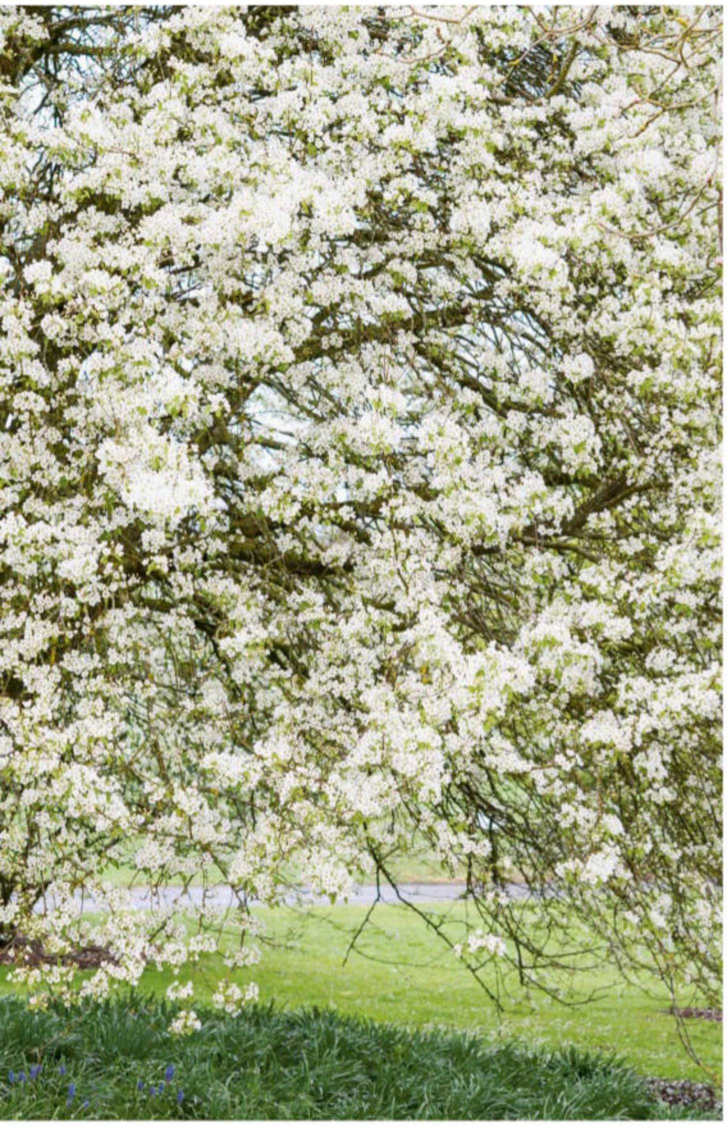
WORDS: JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR
PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

SWEET PRELUDE

We have had some blossom trickling out over the past couple of months (most notably the winter-flowering cherries, which pop out some flowers whenever there is a warm spell), but the full shebang is not yet with us. Ornamental cherry blossom is the big one but you should never underestimate the sheer deliciousness of pure-white pear blossom. Like an archangel fluttering its wings (and the promise of fruit later in the year).

Pyrus caucasica

Prune carefully during the winter (watching out for crossing branches). If you are a skilled gardener, propagate by grafting in autumn.
H x S 10m x 10m



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The Full Monty

Creating gardens in the very different conditions of Wales, Greece and Herefordshire, has taught **Monty** the art of adapting to your garden's needs

My garden and I are now entering our 35th year together and although we have had our ups and downs, by and large we are growing old disgracefully together. I know every inch and fold of it and how it appears in all seasons and all weathers, in sickness and in health. We know our weaknesses and accept them because we love each other – at least I love Longmeadow and feel enriched by what I receive in return, call it what you may.

But I confess that I am not horticulturally monogamous and these liaisons have only enriched my intimacy with Longmeadow. The first began 20 years ago when we bought our little farm just over the border in Wales. It is a landscape as different as might be conceived from Longmeadow and I love it unreservedly. I have not made a garden there, but over the past two decades we have planted thousands of trees, miles of hedging, made acres of wildflower meadows and worked in the woods and streams so they might appear entirely natural, despite involving many happy hours of work. But aside from all the trees, I have not added a single herbaceous plant, grass, bulb, fern or flowering shrub. There is just a small herb bed outside the kitchen door, some simple yew topiary, an orchard and everything flowing from the conventional realm of garden into landscape.

It has confirmed to me that the real defining factor of a garden is that it must have a gardener. Let nature to do its thing and it quickly leaves any notion of a garden behind. But how much to garden, when to plant, shape and control and when to leave alone is something that this hillside has taught me, and which I try to apply to Longmeadow in a way that evolves from season to season.

By and large it means doing less but sometimes being braver and more radical. It means that I do more of what I call fingertip gardening – a little here, and little there, reacting to what is happening rather than imposing a pre-ordained regime so that things appear loose and free and almost ready to spill over and outgrow the garden. But I stress that this involves daily management in order to look as though it is unmanaged.

My other horticultural mistress is very different again. For the past eight years I have been helping create and look after a garden on a Greek island. Where Longmeadow is wet and fertile, frosty and snowy in winter and mild and never very dry in summer, this garden can go months without rain with temperatures in the high 30s for weeks on end and the soil is stony and poor. For years I had written about 'Mediterranean' plants and how to grow them, but actually having to do it has taught me more in the past eight years than in the previous 30. It has taught me to work within the limitations of what will thrive and not to try and impose what I think 'should' grow well despite all the evidence to the contrary. In other words it has greatly broadened my own gardening experience and although the other two places – a wet Welsh hillside where everything is above a thousand feet and on a steep slope and a dead flat Herefordshire floodplain – could scarcely be more different to this sunbaked Greek island, it all feeds back into depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding.

> *"It has taught me to work within the limitations of what will thrive."*

The most curious link between the three gardens is that water is the dominant feature. On the Welsh hillside the water is always moving, it pours and roars and creates stunning gullies or dingles, gouged deep by thousands of years of some of the heaviest rainfall in the British Isles. At Longmeadow, the rain tends to stick around and we flood regularly but the upside is that we have not known any kind of drought in the 35 years we have been here and have never been short of water. In Greece the rain tends to come in bursts, mostly in winter and often not for months on end so water storage is essential but, counter-intuitively, I have learnt that the biggest problems for plants in this extreme climate comes not from too little water but too much. The plants that will thrive best have adapted and are more likely to suffer from over-eager watering than drought.

In the end it all comes back to paying attention to what is happening rather than following pre-ordained rules. There is a tendency for us all to learn timings and techniques as though they were hard and fast rules. But to make and nurture the garden you love needs the ability to adapt according to its real needs rather than what you have learnt by rote. Just like any good human relationship.

Monty

PHOTO: MARSHA ARNOLD

BBC TWO **MONTY ON TV** Monty and the GW team are back on our screens every Friday. And don't miss Monty's new podcast in our Spring Conversations series starting in April at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

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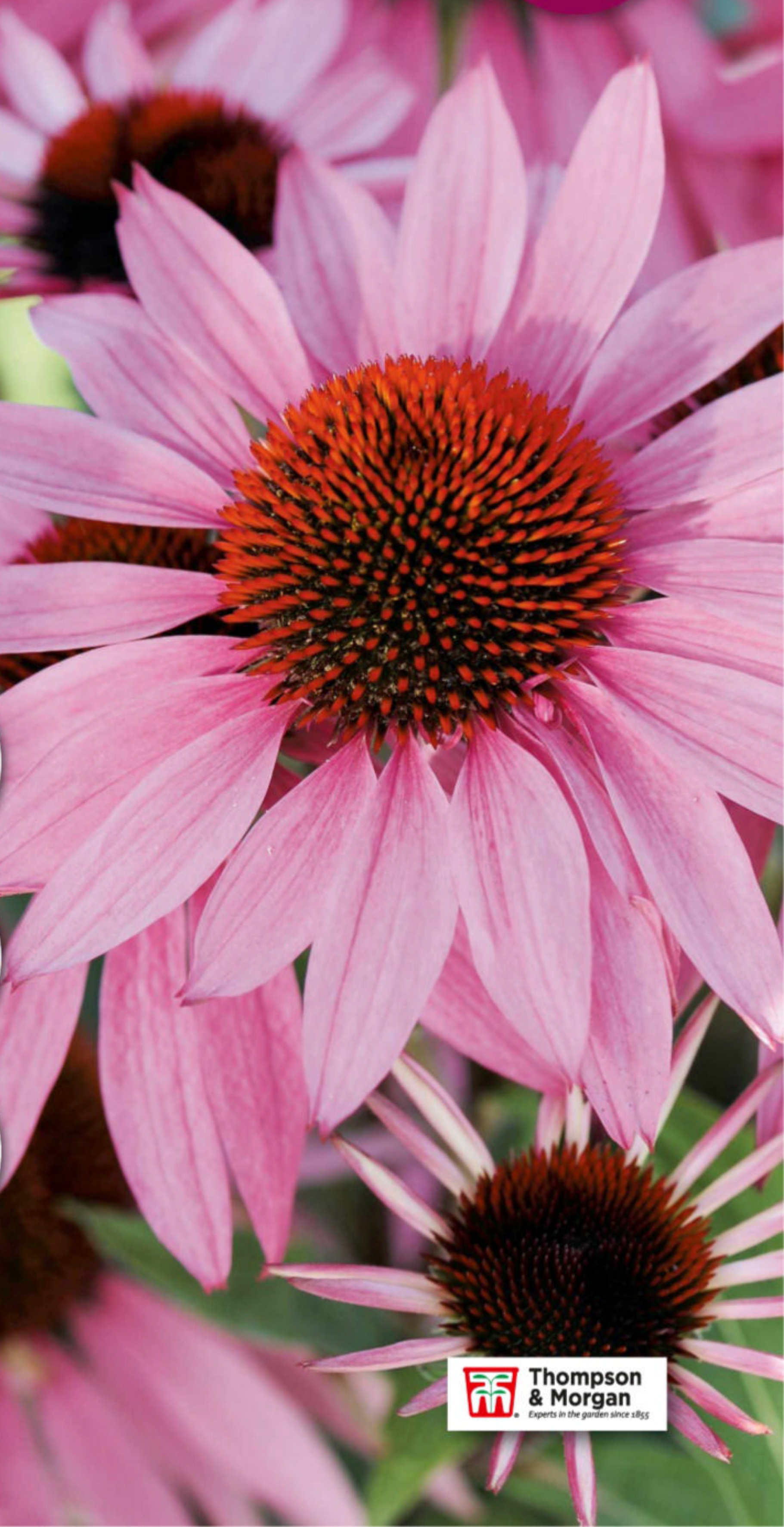

■ ***Geum* 'Mrs J. Bradshaw'** *x 6*
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H x S 60cm x 60cm
F Jun-Sept

***Achillea millefolium* 'Cerise Queen'** *x 6*
Bright cerise-pink flowers on tall stems above aromatic, feathery foliage. Attracts butterflies and other pollinators.
H x S 60cm x 60cm
F May-Aug

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H x S 45cm x 40cm
F Jun-Sep

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H x S 50cm x 40cm
F May-Jul
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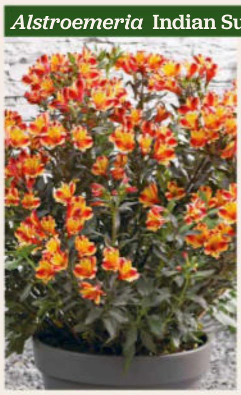
Alstroemeria Indian Summer



Compact with an upright habit. Great for borders and patio containers.

H x S 75cm x 60cm
F Jun-Nov
■ 1 jumbo plug ~~£11.99~~ **£9.99 SAVE £2** *(40844)*
■ 3 jumbo plugs ~~£35.97~~ **£17.99 SAVE £17.98** *(KB7784)*

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F Jul-Sep
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H x S 50cm x 30cm
F Jun-Aug
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Verbena bonariensis

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H x S 1.2m x 60cm
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Expert's choice

Aquilegia

For unusual blooms in all colours, shapes and sizes, you can't go far wrong with these easy-to-grow characters, says **Graham Rice**

Aquilegias (columbines) are probably the most promiscuous plants we grow. Most varieties will hybridise with each other and self-sown seedlings will pop up all over the place, producing flowers in an unpredictable range of colours.

I once had a friend who loved aquilegias. In fact, he held the Plant Heritage National Collection. To keep the many varieties in his collection true to type, he grew them in large pots and, as flowering time approached, used a sack barrow to wheel the plants from his garden to other gardens around his village – one garden, one plant. When they'd set seed, he moved them back. The idea was to keep each variety separate to prevent bees cross-pollinating the flowers, which results in blooms in unpredictable colours, whatever the label says. In the end, it just didn't work – the bees simply flew too far.

Two lessons from all this. If you really don't mind what colours your aquilegias are, then simply let the bees do their business and enjoy the variety of self-sown seedlings when they flower. The other approach is to deadhead your aquilegias ruthlessly, preventing any self-sown seedlings, and buy fresh seed every year or two. The seed companies have techniques to keep the seeds true to type, so you'll know exactly what to expect.

Care

- Sow seed in April-June, in cells of fresh seed compost, and keep in a cold greenhouse, under a cloche or in a sheltered place outside to germinate. Thin seedlings to one per cell and plant out in autumn, in rich but free-draining soil in sun or part shade.
- Beware downy mildew, which causes yellowing foliage and purple blotches on the stems. Burn infected plants.

Where to buy

nickys-nursery.co.uk, 01843 600972;
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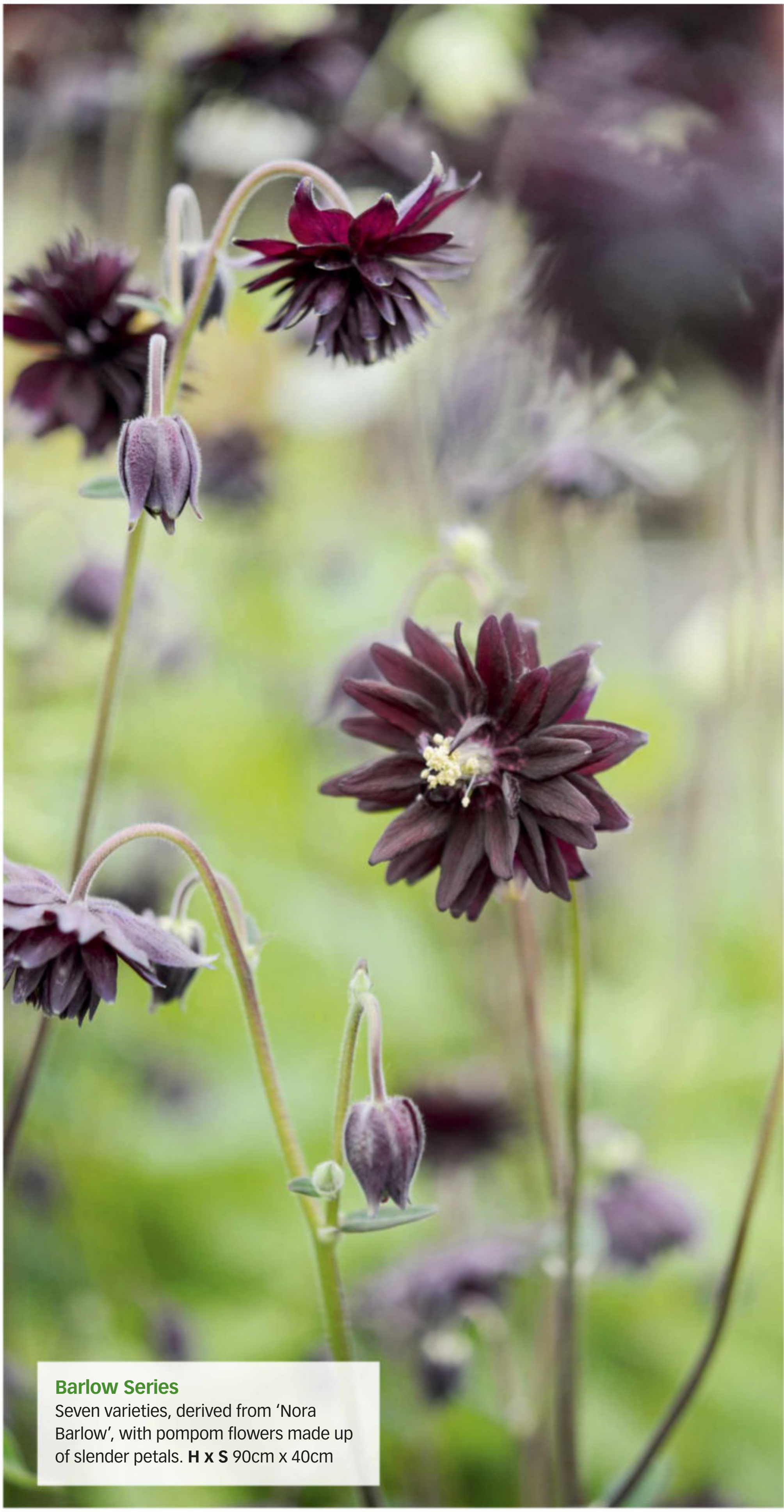
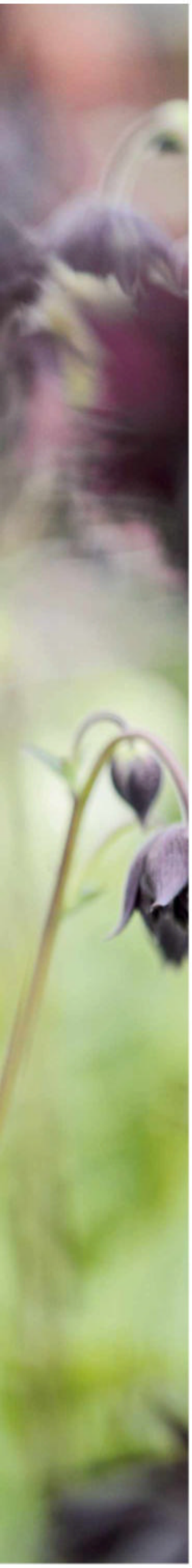
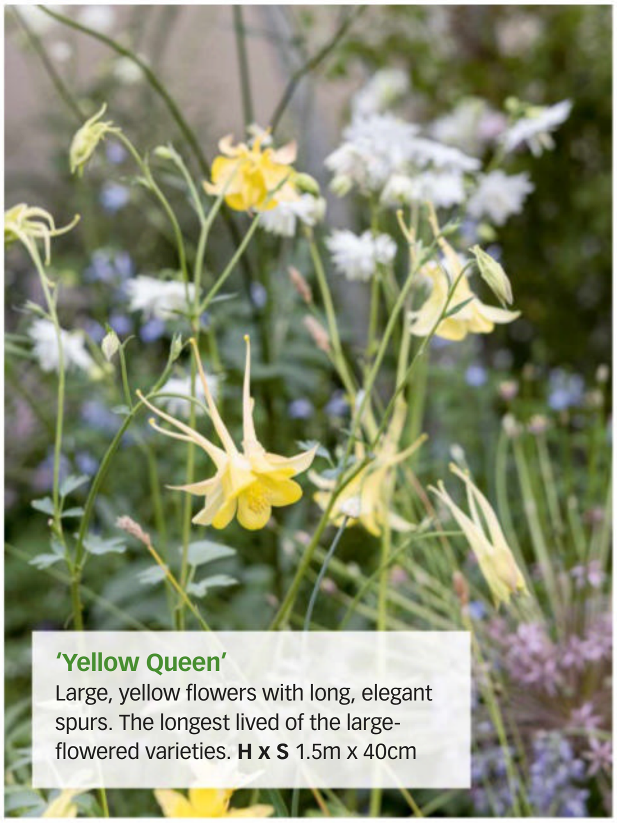
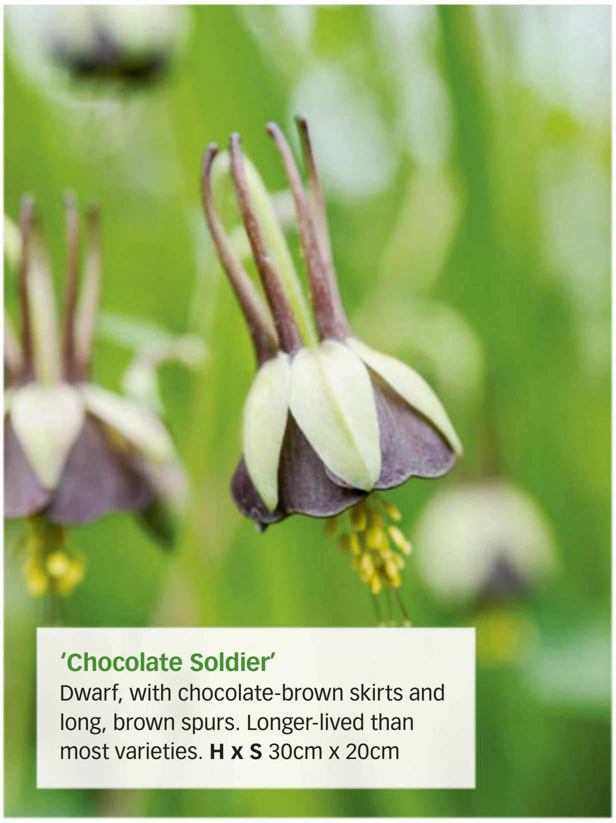


Barlow Series
Seven varieties, derived from 'Nora Barlow', with pompom flowers made up of slender petals. **H x S** 90cm x 40cm

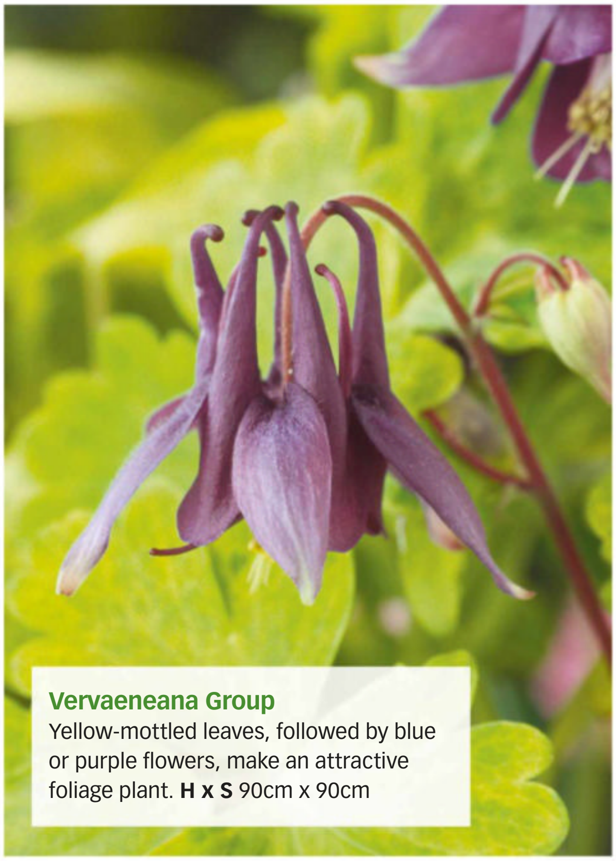




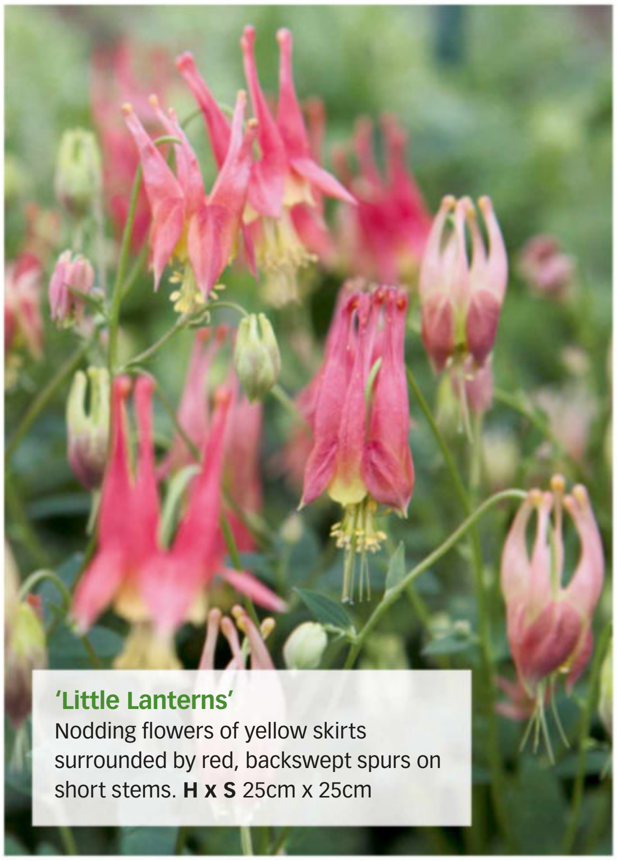
‘Yellow Queen’
Large, yellow flowers with long, elegant spurs. The longest lived of the large-flowered varieties. **H x S** 1.5m x 40cm



‘Chocolate Soldier’
Dwarf, with chocolate-brown skirts and long, brown spurs. Longer-lived than most varieties. **H x S** 30cm x 20cm



Vervaeneana Group
Yellow-mottled leaves, followed by blue or purple flowers, make an attractive foliage plant. **H x S** 90cm x 90cm



‘Little Lanterns’
Nodding flowers of yellow skirts surrounded by red, backswept spurs on short stems. **H x S** 25cm x 25cm

Aquilegia

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Seed sowing			🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩						
Flowering				🟪	🟪	🟪	🟪					

PHOTOS: ALAMY/CHRISTOPHER BURROWS; SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

2 for 1 Gardens

April flowers

Celebrating 30 years of 2 for 1 Gardens

Ruth Stout said, "I love spring anywhere, but if I could choose I would always greet it in a garden". So let's celebrate the **2 for 1 Gardens** bursting into life now

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Springtime spectacular

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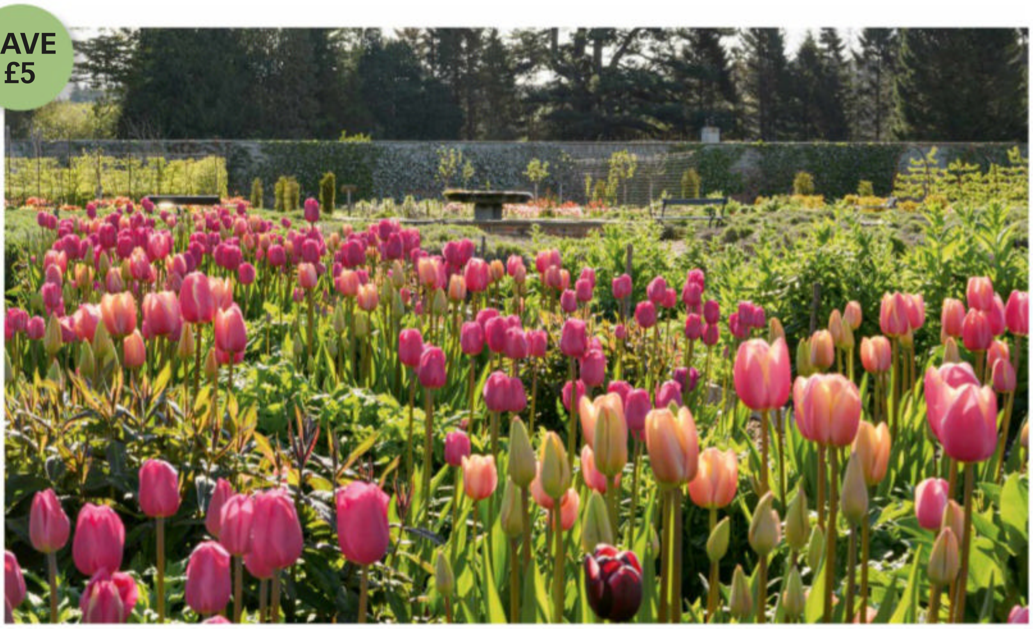
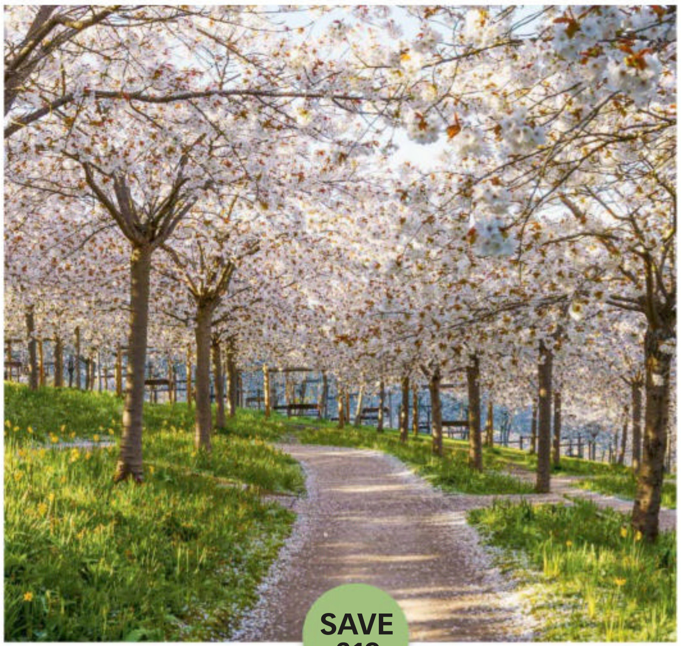
There are few better places to celebrate the arrival of spring than **Doddington Hall Garden**, Lincolnshire, with its spring bulb pageant. Established in the 1950s, this long-standing tradition heralds the changing seasons, with over 150,000 bulbs. The bold display of bright-yellow daffodils and vivid-purple anemones dominates the Wild Garden, but look closely and you'll find snake's head fritillaries and white wood anemones carpeting the floor. Be sure to salute the four topiary unicorns guarding the house. **OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £9.50**. Offer not valid 26 Jul-7 Sep nor during the Christmas opening. **doddingtonhall.com**

Kitchen pink

SAVE £5

Renovations have been ongoing at **Gordon Castle Walled Garden**, Morayshire, for over 12 years, and at 200 years old it's one of Britain's oldest and largest working kitchen gardens. Visit now to find 70,000 spring bulbs tumbling over borders, providing masses of colour and bold forms. Bouquets are made daily in the cut-flower garden for visitors to take home, and in the cherry orchard, the bright-pink petals of its 50 fruiting cherry trees cheer up the greyest of days. **OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £5** (£10 May-Oct). Booking recommended. **gordoncastle.co.uk**





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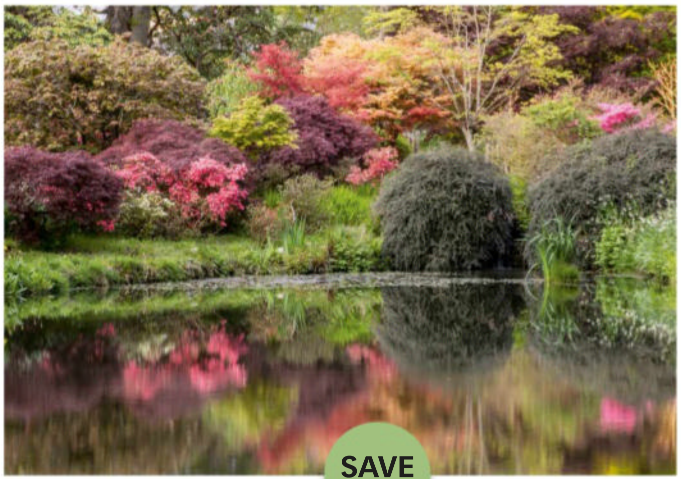
The cherry on top

In Northumberland, the spring showstopper is the remarkable performance by **The Alnwick Garden**'s Taihaku cherry blossom. With over 392 Taihaku, the largest collection in the world, these trees bloom in unison from mid-April, then the pure-white petals float to the ground like falling snow. Elsewhere, there is plenty of spring colour, including the shocking violet of *Iris reticulata* 'Pixie' and a vibrant array of tulips. Other must-visits include a treetop walkway, a grand cascade and The Poison Garden.

OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £19 Booking essential. Offer not valid during school hols or bank hols. **alnwickgarden.com/gardeners-world**



SAVE £17

Seasonal spectrum

Many presume that most gardens are at their peak at the height of summer, but **Exbury Gardens**, Hampshire, is famed for its spring displays. Visit now to find its world-famous collection of azaleasand rhododendrons.

The kaleidoscope of colour continues with a golden daffodil meadow that meanders down to the picturesque Beaulieu River, plus there are 600 types of camellias, 100s of magnolias and the River of Gold, which contains over 100,000 yellow and blue spring bulbs.

OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £14 (£17 Apr-Jun). Booking recommended. **exburygardens.co.uk**

SAVE £18

Great debate

Lord Fairhaven lived at **Anglesey Abbey**, Cambridgeshire, for 40 years but this was not long enough for him to settle his great debate – tulips or hyacinths? While his choice of spring bulb fluctuated over the years, today there are rows of blue and white hyacinths, with tulips providing flashes of bright reds and hot pinks. The main drive is studded with swathes of golden daffodils and, with over 40 varieties, including the newly planted 'Dutch Master', you're bound to spot a new favourite.

In the spring garden, trees jostle for attention against the bulbs, but the white blossom of the Juneberry tree and *Aesculus* 'Erythroblastosis''s pink leaves steal the show. Plus, from 5 to 21 April, there's a special Shaun the Sheep activities trail for the whole family to enjoy.

OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £18. Open all year. **nationaltrust.org.uk/angleseyabbey**

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Before visiting a garden remember to check its website for opening and closing times as they can vary

PHOTOS: ALNWICK GARDEN; ED BOLLOM; DODDINGTON HALL; NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/MIKE SELBY; STEPHEN STUDD

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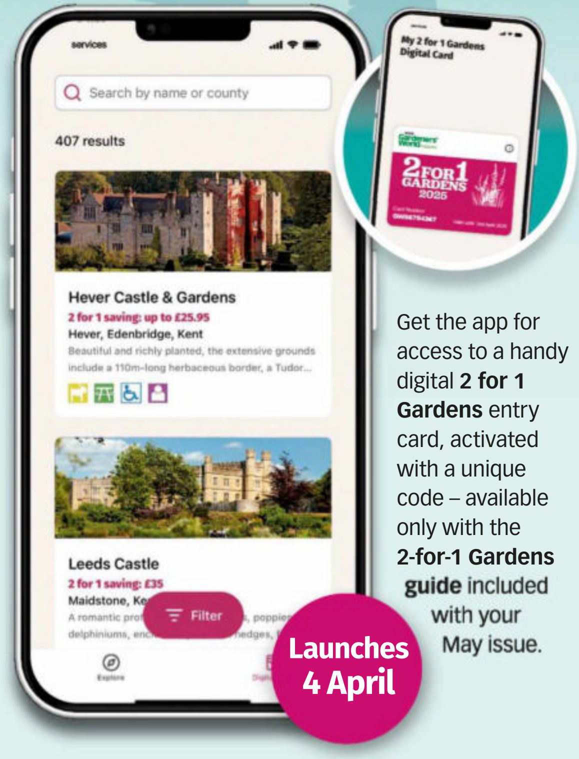
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TRIPSMITHS

Lilies are summertime essentials for Monty, both in borders and pots

> “It’s perfect sense to plant your summer bulbs as the soil starts to warm up”

SUMMER *splendour*

Bulbs aren't just for springtime – they can also be at the heart of wonderful displays from June onwards. Unlock their potential with **Monty**'s pick of warm-season wonders

For many gardeners, the words 'spring' and 'bulbs' are inextricably yoked. But there are bulbs that will produce flowers for every month of the year. Funnily enough, the summer-flowering ones never really get the attention they deserve. I suppose spring-flowering bulbs are doubly precious because they provide by far the biggest hit of colour at a time when we're all fed up with the brown drabness of winter. But it is a pity and a waste not to explore the full range of bulbous possibilities in summer.

Whereas most spring-flowering bulbs will die down before blazing summer heat and drought, summer-flowering ones relish it. They tend to come from parts of the globe where the summers are warm and moist. This is why a typical British summer will suit many bulbs, such as lilies, which come from Asia where a monsoon, in all its torrential glory, provides the water for the year, and gladioli and eucomis, which come from the Eastern Cape in South Africa with similar summer rainfall to us.

Knowing this, it makes perfect sense to plant your summer bulbs in spring as the soil is beginning to warm up in tune with the rhythm of their growth rather than in autumn, when they will have to spend the winter months in cold, wet soil, which is not a natural state for them to be in. I reckon summer is here when the ash trees

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

Gladioli can reach great heights in Longmeadow's rich, heavy soil

are in full leaf and I can still see the swifts sliding across the Prussian blue sky.

Glamorous gladioli

I was brought up with a bed of gladioli grown each year, alongside dahlias and chrysanthemums, specifically for cutting. They came in a range of 1950s lipstick pinks, pastel yellows, mauves and oranges. But there are some wonderfully rich colours too, especially among the nearly 200 species gladioli, such as the deep magenta *Gladiolus communis* subsp. *byzantinus*, the bright red *G. cardinalis* and white *G. murielae* with its striking purple-red interior. Some of the florist varieties are also brilliantly coloured. 'Fidelio' is bright pink and 'Green Star' is what my American friends would describe as 'chartroose'.

Most gladioli are tender and are best dug up each winter. However *G. communis* subsp. *byzantinus* is a hardy perennial that comes from the Mediterranean and doesn't need lifting after flowering, unlike most gladioli which come from South Africa. Plant it in autumn and it will flower from May to June. *G. papilio* is another hardy variety although I find it can be invasive. It has glaucous leaves and for me flowers well in a damp, rich soil from May to June. I think of it as a bulb that can be naturalised and treat it as you might bluebells, snowdrops or narcissi.

Unlike species gladioli, florist ones need quite a lot of tending to get the best out of them. They must be staked individually, deadheaded, weeded, watered and fed. They are also prone to attack from gladiolus thrips, a tiny black insect that feeds on both foliage and flowers. Gladioli only flower for a couple of weeks, so plant a handful of the small corms every couple of weeks from Easter to Whitsun to maintain a succession of flowers.

Loveletter to lilies

The next major player in the summer bulb stakes is the lily. It is easiest to divide them into three groups: the species (such as *Lilium martagon*, *L. regale* and *L. candidum*), the Asiatic hybrids, and the North American lilies, which are mostly Oregon hybrids. All lilies have bulbs with open scales, like half-opened artichokes. Some, such as *L. canadense* and *L. nepalense*, which was discovered by my forebear David Don, are stoloniferous. That is to say, they send out horizontal stems or 'stolons' that form new bulbs and will quickly colonise an area in loose soil.

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

Lilies grow well in pots but feeding is vital for a good show of flowers

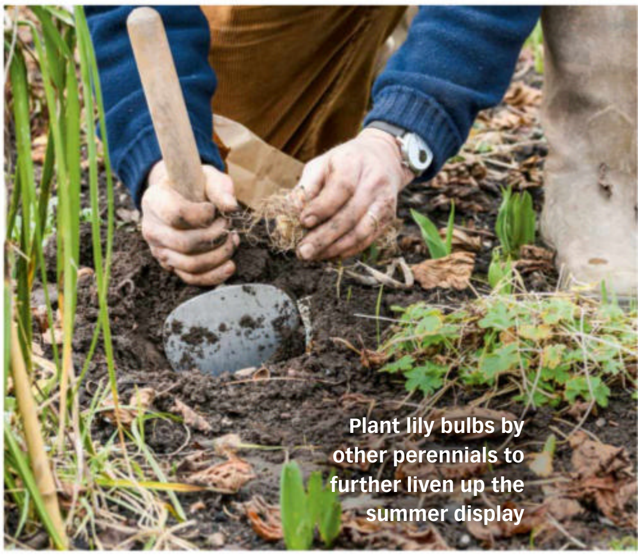
WHEN TO PLANT OUT SUMMER-FLOWERING BULBS

April-May

- **Lilies**
- **Dahlias**
- **Crocosmia**
- **Gladioli**
- **Freesias**
- **Eucomis**
- **Galtonia**

September-October

- **Alliums**
- ***Eremurus robustus***



Plant lily bulbs by other perennials to further liven up the summer display

> “Lilies always do well in pots as long as you add plenty of leafmould to the compost”

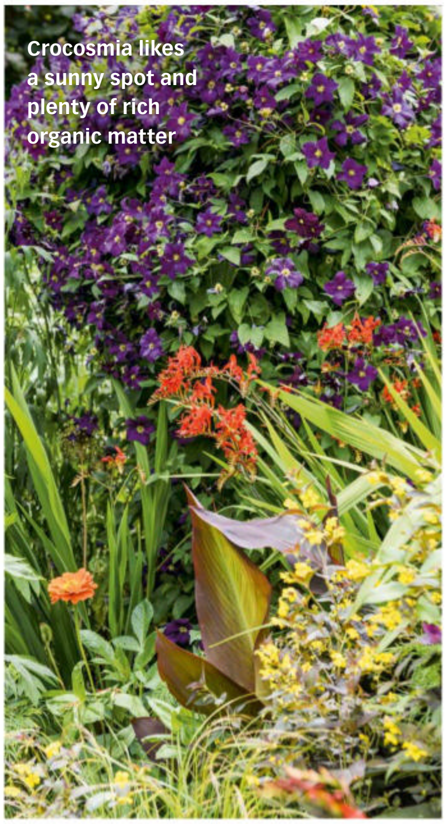
Many lilies grow better in slightly acidic soil and most are perfectly happy in a loose soil with lots of leafmould, plus an annual mulch of the same. The Madonna lily, *L. candidum*, which flowers in July, is the one exception and does best in alkaline, sunny conditions. But lilies are essentially woodland plants and like cool, loose soil and sun on their faces. If this sounds complicated, bear in mind that lilies always do well in pots as long as you add plenty of leafmould to the compost. Don't cram too many into a pot. Give them lots of space – no more than three bulbs to a 5-litre container – and they will grow strongly and produce masses of flowers over a longer period.

L. regale, which flowers from July to August, is perhaps the most voluptuous lily in terms of its flowers and fragrance. It's one of the easiest to grow but it is top-heavy and will need support. It was discovered by Ernest Wilson in 1903 in a steep Chinese valley, where according to his own account on page three of his book, *The Lilies of Eastern Asia*, he says: *There, in June, by the wayside, in rock-crevices by the torrent's edge, and high up on the mountainside and precipice this Lily in full bloom greets the weary wayfarer. Not in twos and threes but in hundreds, in thousands, aye, in tens of thousands.*

Wilson brought *L. regale* bulbs home and two years later, they flowered. Previously, lily growing had been the preserve of specialists, but *L. regale* was so easy to grow that, 90 years on, it is still the most popular garden lily. It comes from Sichuan, which has very hot summers and equally cold winters, so it is very hardy, although the leaves and buds can be nipped by late frosts. Just make sure it has good drainage because it copes much better with drought than it does with being wet.

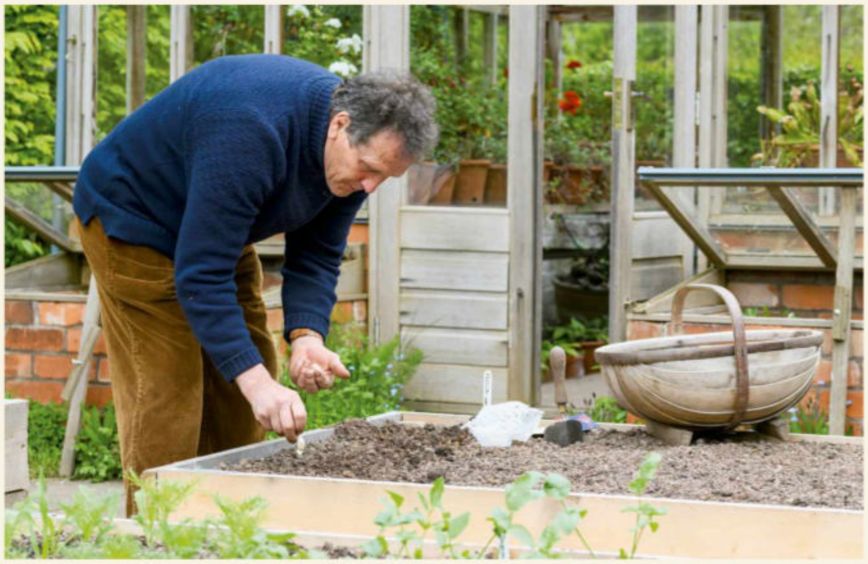
Martagon lilies have a mass of small turk's cap flowers and superbly structured foliage. They are very happy in full sun or partial shade and do well among shrubs in a mixed border. I am a fan of *L. henryi*, which grows in the heavy, damp soil of my garden where it reaches seven or eight feet tall and has bright orange blooms from July to August. It looks wonderful in the right place but can look awkward – like turning up to a formal dinner party in fancy dress.

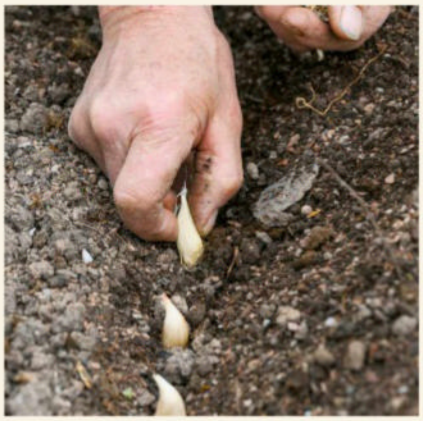
There are many other types of lily that adorn the summer, which are not true lilies. I adore the foxtail lily, *Eremurus robustus*, which flowers from July to August, and is a fleshy-rooted perennial rather than a bulb. Cardiocrinum, however, is a true bulb although it's not a true lily and it's as melodramatic a plant as any. *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, the giant Himalayan lily, flowers from June to July and can reach 13ft tall, with its glossy leaves and flower spike of white trumpets. It needs a moisture-retentive, but not wet, soil and


Crocosmia likes a sunny spot and plenty of rich organic matter

HOW TO PLANT FREESIAS

Freesias grow from bulb-like corms and can be planted outside between April and June. Choose a sheltered spot with plenty of sun, planting into well drained soil or compost.


1 **Plant** the bulbs with the pointy end facing up, in a drill that is 3-5cm deep. Alternatively plant 3-5cm deep in containers.


2 **Space** bulbs 5cm apart, in rows that are about 15cm apart.

3 **Cover** the bulbs over with soil or compost and water well.

– harder to control – a damp atmosphere. Hot, dry summers don't suit it at all. The bulbs die after flowering and offsets can take three or four years to bloom, so plant new bulbs every year, keeping the tips just below the surface.

Late summer glories

More accommodating is the fabulous *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer', with its wonderfully fiery flowers from August to September, and great spears of leaf. It's in every garden nowadays, and rightly so. It likes a rich soil with plenty of organic matter to hold in moisture, and lots of sunshine.

There are other good crocosmia cultivars, such as the later and much longer-lasting *C.* x *crocosmiiflora* 'Emily McKenzie', which has orange flowers from July to September, *C.* 'Bressingham Blaze', which has bright red flowers from August to September, and *C.* x *crocosmiiflora* 'Citronella' J.E. Fitt , which is a delicate shade of yellow and flowers from July to August. Finally, we move into late summer with the South African bulbs, such as eucomis and galtonia. The most exotic of the lot is eucomis.

Eucomis looks as if it belongs in a conservatory but, despite its South African provenance, it copes well with British winters as long as it is mulched heavily with bracken or straw and has reasonable drainage. It's dormant all winter, resuming growth fairly late in spring, so it is not harmed by lifting, storing and replanting. I particularly like the purple-leaved and flowered hybrids of *Eucomis comosa*.

Galtonia candicans, with its white flower bells, always looks good at the back of my mixed border, the stems reaching 6ft in rich soil. If you have fast-draining, sandy soil, it will need a heavy mulch as it hates drying out. Galtonias are fairly hardy but a bit touch and go in winter. If in doubt, treat them like dahlias and plant the bulbs in pots in spring, grow them on, then plant them out when the soil has warmed up. Lift them in November and store them somewhere cool and dry. ☐

> *"Crocosmia likes a rich soil with lots of organic matter to hold in moisture, and plenty of sun"*

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NEXT MONTH **Monty shares the many attractions of drought-tolerant alpines and succulents**

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

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Blooming showcases

Creating beautiful indoor floral displays is about giving your flowers the support they need to look their very best. **Shilpa Reddy** shows how with four easy makes

PHOTOS SARAH CUTTLE

TOP TIP

Add a splash of bleach to your vase water to keep blooms fresh and your water clear.

Shilpa Reddy left a career in medicine to launch her floral design company in 2017. She now teaches the art of arranging blooms creatively and sustainably. ***@shilpareddyflowers***

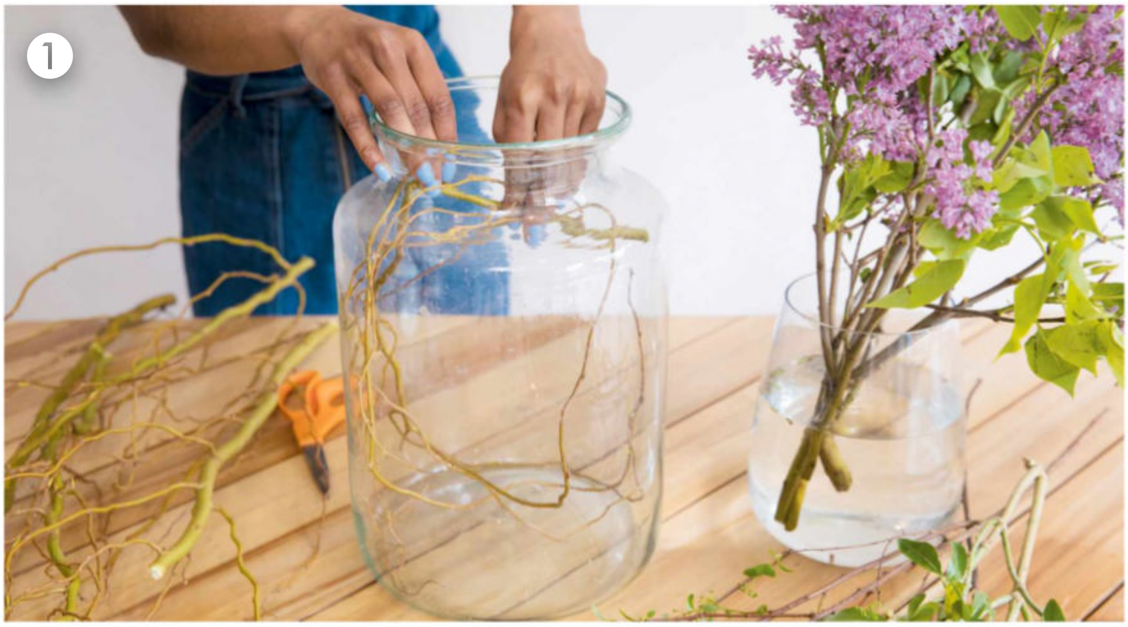
Spring has sprung! This means that now is the perfect time to start planning how to best display flowers and foliage from your garden. Why not try your hand at flower arranging? It's easier than you might think. Right now, budding branches and early-flowering bulbs are bursting with life, offering instant inspiration.

Forget complicated techniques and floral foam – embrace simple, sustainable methods like using willow branches, pebbles, or even just a vase filled with water.

From simple posies to dramatic displays, let your garden guide you. So grab your secateurs and get creative!

It's show time

Create a flamboyant floral display that will brighten any room. This simple technique uses clever support methods to hold even the largest blooms.

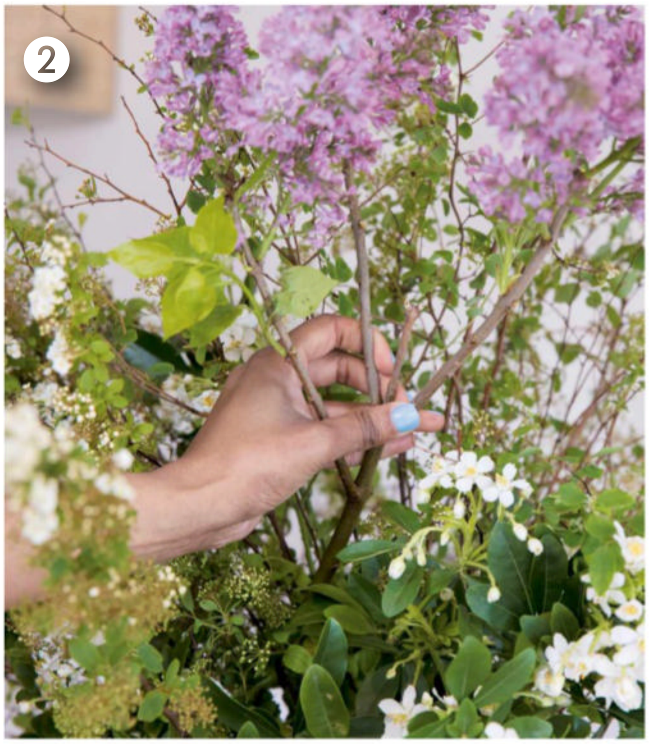


① Build your support

Choose a tall vase and gather a selection of branches. Create a 'scaffold' by curling flexible willow around the inside of the vase. Start adding sturdy flowering shrubs or lush greenery – I've used spirea and lilac – into the vase at a diagonal all around the edge, ensuring that the branches criss-cross at the base (main image), as we're trying to create more support for the rest of your branches. Rotate your vase each time you add a stem so you can create a 360° arrangement.

② Finish your display

Once you have branches all along the outer edge of the vase, you can start adding more into the centre. They should be able to stand up as they'll be supported by the framework of earlier branches. At this point you could add more flowers such as long-stem roses or tulips. Here, I'm using fragrant lilac in the centre. Don't worry if the flower stems don't reach the bottom of the vase. As long as the bases of the stems are submerged in water, they'll stay hydrated.



TOP TIP

Open up the tulips by peeling back the petals to reveal the delicate colours and patterns within.

Spring reflections

Celebrate the vibrant colours of spring with a stylish tulip centrepiece. This elegant arrangement using a see-through glass container resembles a mini lily pond and is easier to create than you might think.

① Create a natural base

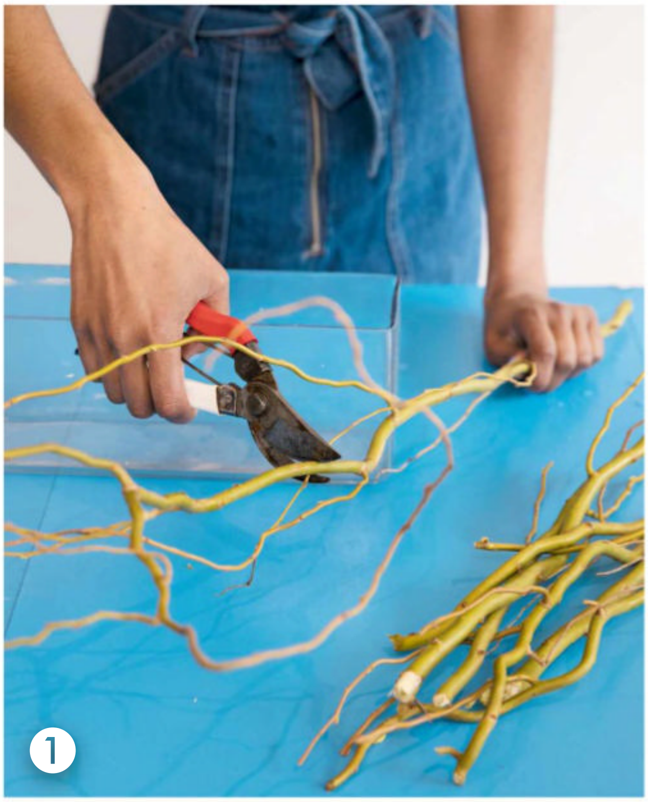
Select a shallow glass container or dish. Choose a transparent container as this allows you to view your stems from the outside too. A container with straight sides works best here. Gather some pliable willow or other young branches from your garden. Wedge the branches into the container, creating a criss-cross pattern that will hold your tulips in place.

② Add your tulips

Cut your tulips down to varying lengths. To help them stand tall, carefully insert a piece of 22-gauge floristry wire into the base of each stem and wind it all the way up. This will provide the tulips with extra support and prevent them from drooping.

③ Arrange and enjoy

Insert the wired tulip stems into the gaps between the willow branches, varying the heights to create a dynamic display. Add water to the container to keep the flowers hydrated. Consider combining tulips with other spring blooms such as hyacinths for a spectacular spring display!



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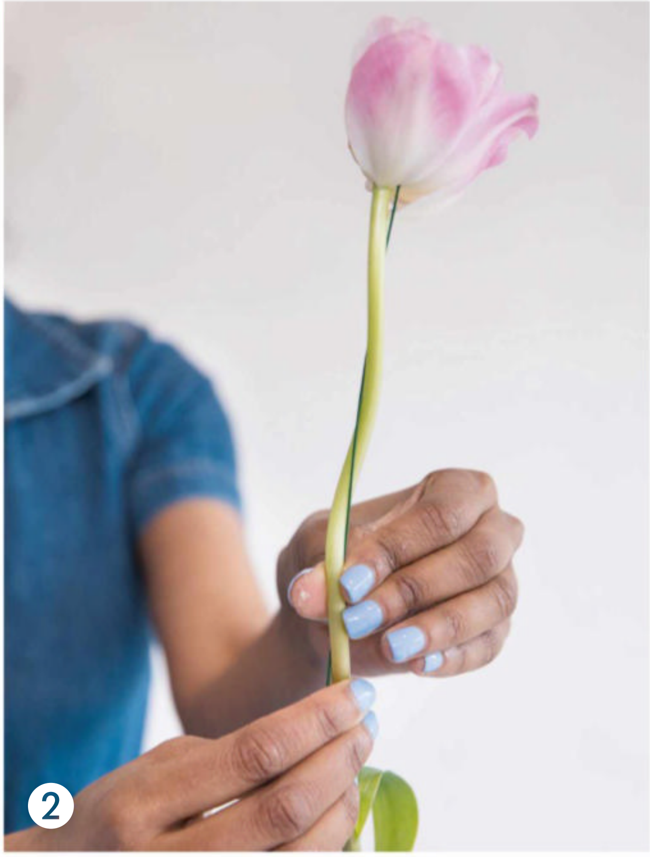

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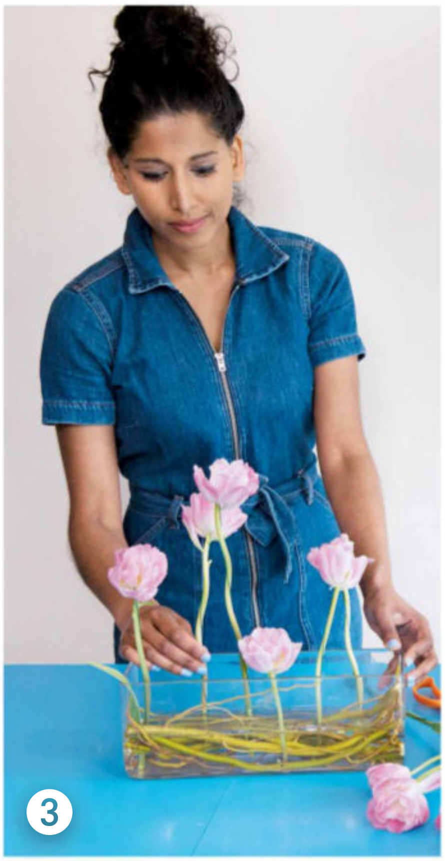

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Stand to attention

Get crafty and use air-dry clay to showcase fresh flowers in a simple yet striking display. The clay disc acts as a temporary base that helps your blooms stand proud in any shaped vase or bowl.

TOP TIP

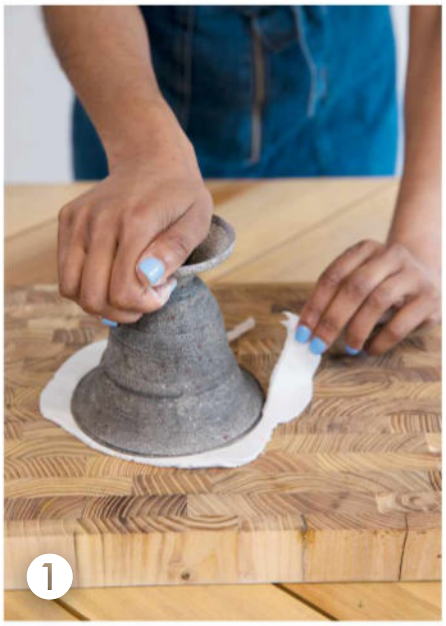
Seal your clay disc with varnish if you want a water-resistant base that you can reuse.

① Prepare the base

Roll out some air-dry clay to a thickness of a few millimetres. This will form the base for your arrangement. Then choose a vase or bowl that narrows towards the bottom – you will be using the top of the vase as a template to cut your clay around. Using a tool, such as the back of a ballpoint pen, poke several holes in the clay disc. These holes will allow you to insert your flower stems.

② Assemble and display

Allow the clay disc to dry and harden completely. Fill the container with room-temperature water and place the dried clay disc at the top, securing it with tape if necessary. Now, simply insert your favourite flowers into the holes! Here, I'm creating single displays of daffodils, bluebells and hellebores that can be grouped together for more impact.



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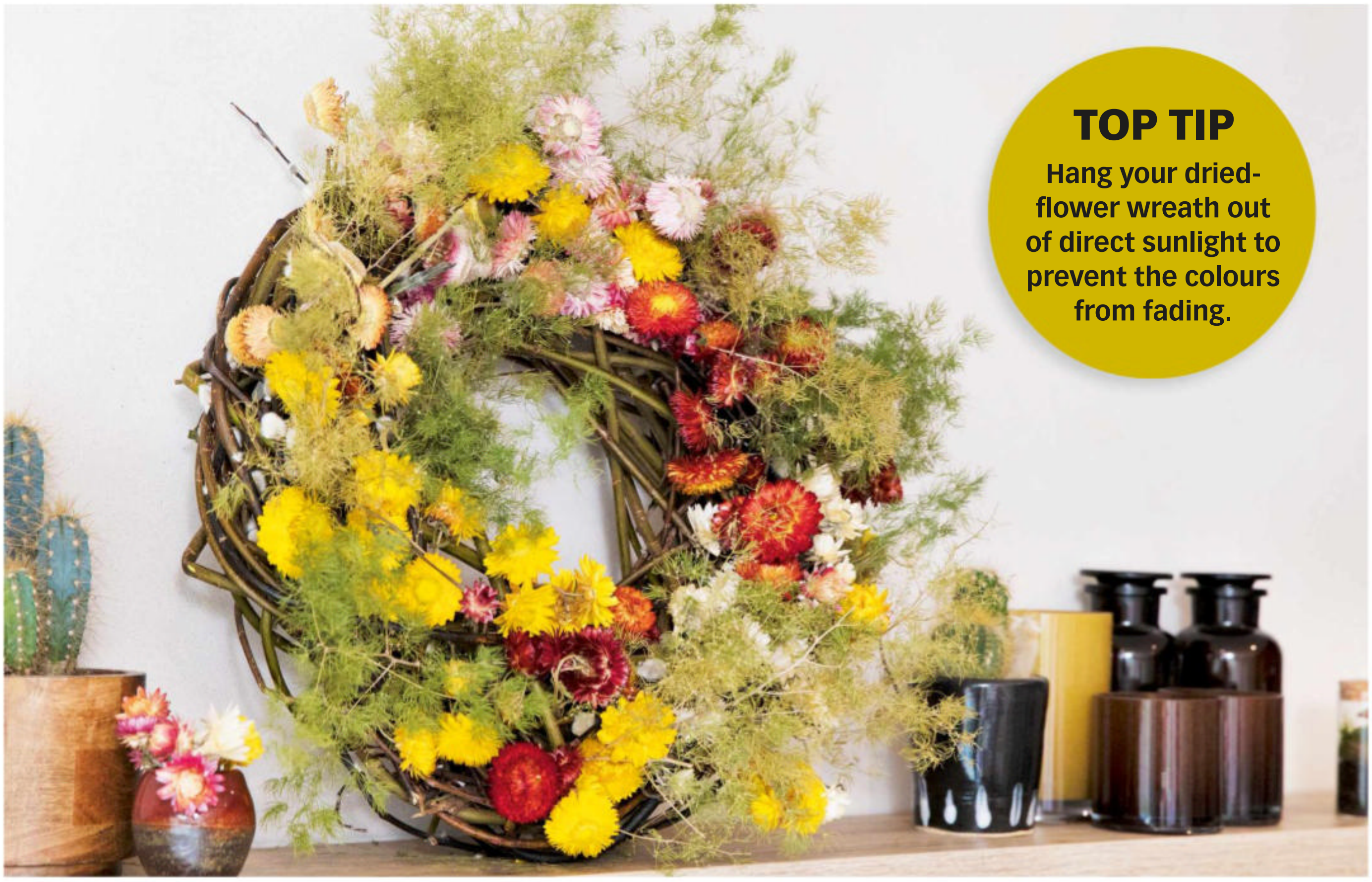
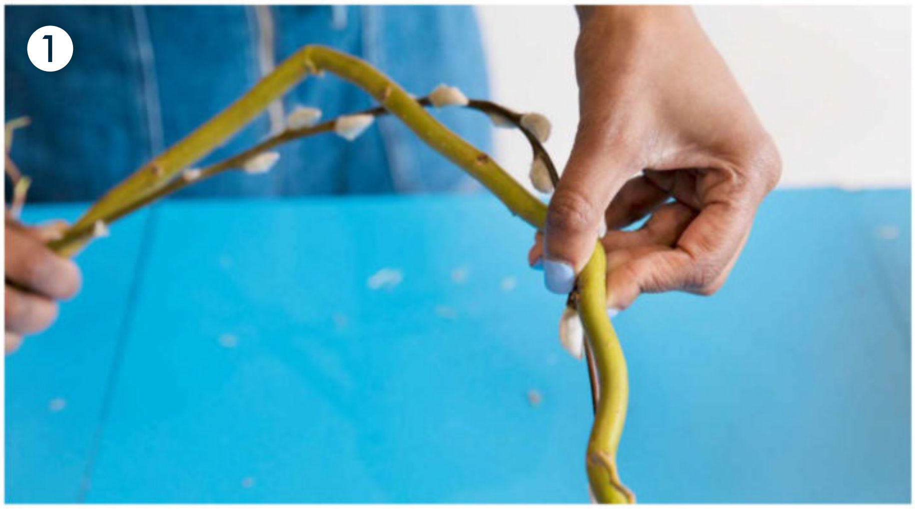
An entrance with a difference

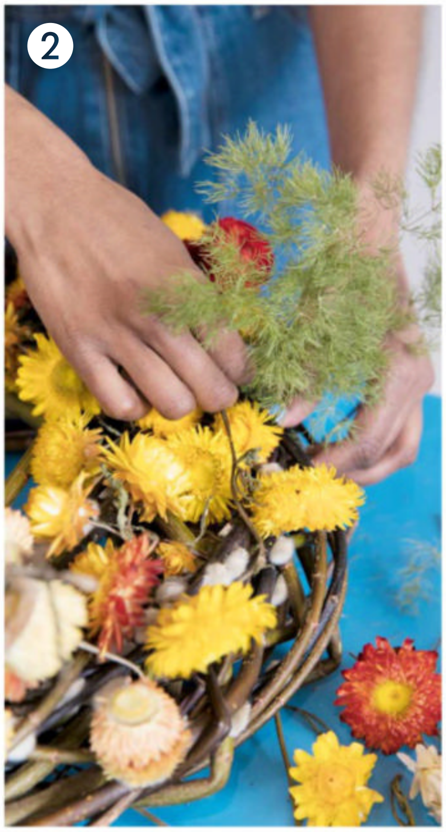
Capture the beauty of your garden with a long-lasting dried-flower wreath. Attach it to your front door for an unusual welcome for visitors to your home.



TOP TIP

Hang your dried-flower wreath out of direct sunlight to prevent the colours from fading.





① Create the base

Gather a bundle of willow or other young, pliable branches. Bend them into a circle, overlapping and intertwining the ends to secure the shape. You can also use floristry wire to bind the branches together for extra strength. I've used reel wire, which is available from your local florist, garden centre or online, but straight 22-gauge floristry wire will work equally well.

② Add your flowers

Choose your favourite dried flowers or herbs. I've kept it simple with vibrant strawflowers and asparagus fern, which will dry in place, but you could use plants like delicate grasses or lavender. Start by adding small bunches of flowers to the willow base, securing them with floristry wire or string. Layer different textures and colours for a beautiful natural effect.

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PHOTO: JASON INGRAM. WITH THANKS TO WEST DEAN GARDENS.

NO-FEAR GARDENING

PART 2: TAKING CONTROL

Everything's growing fast now, weeds included. But don't worry, there's still plenty of time to get on top of it all before summer, says **Frances Tophill**

April can often be one of the most pleasant months to be outside in the garden – if you can dodge the showers. There is a freshness in the air, and yet warmth is now tangible. The birds feel it, too, and are in the throes of the early nesting season. It is a time for hope and promise, when all the hard work goes in to making the rest of the year beautiful.

It's also a time when plants really start to grow; deciduous trees and shrubs will green up, bulbs will flower and might even finish, and grass shoots up. The garden at the end of April is a different beast from that of a few weeks ago. This is a month for activity. Seed sowing is in its absolute prime now. Frost is not always over but it is rare at this time, so you can start to harden off tender perennials.

Sometimes, though, all this vigour can lead to a feeling of being out of control, which if not dealt with quickly can last for the rest of the year. A timely bit of spring cleaning, like mowing and snipping back unruly growth, can set up the space for the summer and mean that you keep a sense of order and don't get overwhelmed. Mess isn't really a problem in the garden as nature loves a little chaos, but for us gardeners – especially if we're just at the start of our journey – it can make us feel as if we have failed. So now really is time to harness spring energy and take a little gentle control, to get ahead.

DEADHEADING SPENT BULBS

Cut back the stems of faded flowers down to soil level. Doing this before the seeds form saves the plant the energy it would put into seed production. Leave all the green leaves in place so the nutrients from them can be absorbed back into the bulb for next year. Cut these back when they turn brown.

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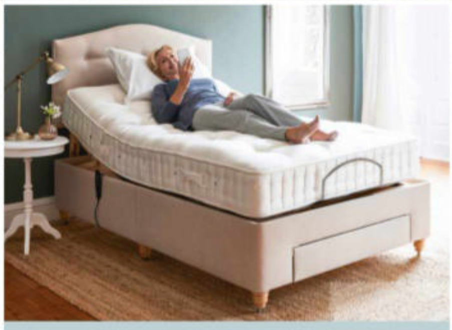

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Media: **BBG25**

To avoid clumpy, uneven grass, mow weekly or fortnightly while the lawn is in strong growth

GROW A HEALTHY LAWN

Lawns have had a bit of bad press in recent years, but they are more environmentally friendly than a patio without drainage or, heaven forbid, plastic grass. They also have the benefit of cooling the summer garden.

Better than a perfect grass sward is a species-rich, mossy and weedy lawn that can feed various wildlife species. April is a time when any lawn will grow vigorously, so to maintain one you need to start a mowing regime. Areas that you want to stay green and vigorous will need to be cut every week or two throughout the growing season. If you want areas of long grass for wildlife, the best thing is to leave a patch unmown from now, for almost the whole summer. When you finally do mow it, in late summer or autumn, you'll need to take care not to injure small animals who thought the area was safe. The grass will turn brown for a while afterwards, but should soon recover.

Now is also a great time to define your lawn's edges. Use a spade and follow a straight string line, or a hosepipe laid in the desired shape, to make sure it is perfect. Stand back and check before you start. You will then be able to keep it trimmed through the summer with edging shears.

Any weedy plants you don't want can be dug out by hand with ease now. Brown and bare patches can be cleared of scrubby grass, raked over and reseeded too. Mix grass seed with a little compost and sand, and scatter over the soil. Water the sown patch and protect the seeds from birds until after germination. If you want to encourage wildflowers don't use compost for this process, as any extra nutrients will help the grasses to outcompete the flowering plants.

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

TRAINING AND TRIMMING CLIMBERS

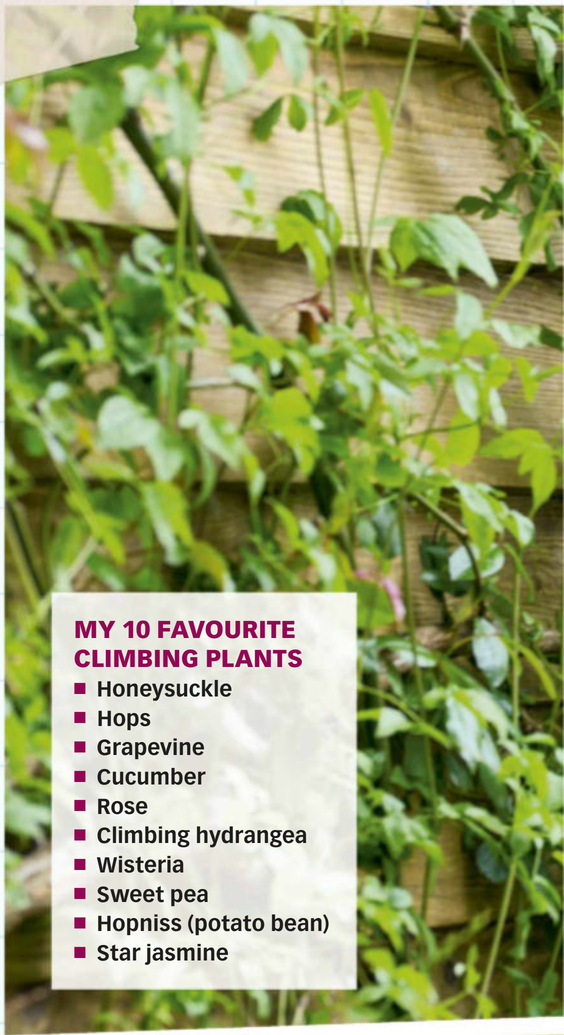
Climbers make a fence or wall infinitely more attractive by adding greenery, flowers and even scent. They can also provide a haven for various forms of wildlife, which use them to forage or nest in. Birds are nesting in April, so it's important to always check climbers for nests before starting any work cutting or trimming them back, otherwise you risk seriously disrupting or even destroying nests, which is illegal.

Another reason I love climbers is they often provide a really space-efficient method of growing produce – training a squash up a fence, growing hops or grapes, can all provide a harvest that only uses the vertical space, while giving us a little more privacy or helping to screen off unwanted views.

There are all kinds of climbers, so it follows that there is no one-size-fits-all rule book for growing them. Some are annual, some perennial. Some, such as hops, die back and shoot from the ground each year, whereas others such as honeysuckle, grow from a permanent woody framework.

Now is a good time for a snip and a bringing into check of sprawling climbers. For thick stems, loppers or pruning saws can be used. For thinner whips that are encroaching on a pathway or spreading too far, secateurs will be best. Sometimes if a climber is a little bushy, like ivy, a hedge trimmer or shears will be in order.

When tying climbers in, make sure there is something stable to attach the stems to. Wires in vine-eyes on a wall is a failsafe support, but trellis, fencing or posts with wires stretched across them can also work well. Use string, wire ties or rubber ties to tie in the stems, with the stems on the side of the support facing you, not tucked behind it against a wall or fence. Don't tie them too tightly, and use a figure-of-eight so that there is a cushion between the support and the stems, which will avoid damage from rubbing. There are a few climbers like grapevines, wisteria and certain clematis that should not be pruned this month, so always check your plant's specific requirements first.



MY 10 FAVOURITE CLIMBING PLANTS

- **Honeysuckle**
- **Hops**
- **Grapevine**
- **Cucumber**
- **Rose**
- **Climbing hydrangea**
- **Wisteria**
- **Sweet pea**
- **Hopniss (potato bean)**
- **Star jasmine**

SPRING PROBLEM-SOLVING

As the days get warmer, challenges can emerge. These include things like an infestation of pests that have come out of hibernation or hatched, and burgeoning weeds.

- **Pest emergence** Look out for insect eggs or things like whitefly, especially on the underside of leaves. They can be particularly problematic in greenhouses.
- **Annual weeds** Germination will be starting in earnest now, so vigilance with pulling them up and regular hoeing will keep these down. Start training your eye for seedling identification.
- **Perennial weeds** Now is the best time to tackle these as the ground is still fairly soft and bare. Remove as much of the root as you can.
- **Spreading perennials** This is a great time to dig up, divide and replant herbaceous perennials that have spread too far and may not flower so well as a result.
- **Late frost damage** Harden off plants slowly by bringing them outside somewhere sheltered, over two weeks. Any damage can often be trimmed off.

BBC Gardeners' World Events

- **Gardeners' World Live** (12-15 June)

Frances will appear on Saturday 14 June

Pull weeds now or they will be likely to smother prized plants later on

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM; TIM SANDALL

Keep an eye out for stray stems on climbers and either tie them in neatly or remove with secateurs

Remove unwanted annual weed flowers before they set seed and spread further

Many plants spread as the centre dies back. Lift, divide and replant the strongest parts

Check for insect eggs or young as they will spread quickly as the weather warms up

NEXT TIME Look out for Frances's July no-fear feature when she'll be making more flowers

Successional interest can come from flowers, foliage and even dried seedheads

Master your mix

Nick's guide to combining plants

Successional planting helps your garden look great all season. In this latest instalment of his series, **Nick Bailey** shows how to get it right

PHOTO: NEIL HEPWORTH

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The idea of successional planting might seem a little bit complicated and daunting at first, but if you have the right planting recipes it's easy. In essence, it's all about grouping together different plants that will grow in close proximity as a tight and cohesive community, with each species taking its turn to shine as we progress through the year. It's a terrific way of maximising flower power and display in even the smallest of spaces. By following this approach to planting it's possible to turn an area as small as one square metre into a plant-packed, year-round display. So, why not try some succession planting in your garden this year?

Nature's way

Successional planting takes many of its cues from how plants grow in nature. A wild prairie, woodland or meadow displays succession through much of the year as species emerge, bloom and recede just in time for the next batch of plants to come to the fore. Transferring the idea into gardens is essentially about replicating those natural communities in a condensed form, but with your own choice of plants and to suit the characteristics of your plot.

At its simplest, successional planting can involve just two plants, for example *Cyclamen hederifolium* and *Convallaria majalis* (lily of the valley). If you plant seven each of these mixed together in just one square metre of semi-shaded garden, you'll have created a near year-round successional display! In spring the marbled leaves of the cyclamen shrivel ahead of their summer dormancy, but just at this moment the convallaria emerges. The convallaria then flowers in mid-spring with its scented blooms, while the foliage goes on to form a lush ground cover. Just as these leaves begin to fade in late summer, the cyclamen burst through with a mass of pink flowers, and then a host of glossy, marbled foliage which looks fresh through winter. It really can be as simple as that, but if you want to push the boundaries the possibilities are endless.

Light bulb moment

Bulbs are an easy and elegant way of achieving succession in most gardens. The common example of this is the pot-grown bulb lasagne. If you've not encountered this technique, it's about laying together three or four species of bulb on top of one another. A simple version might involve miniature daffs which bloom first in March, followed by hyacinths in April and tulips in May. Growing this way really maximises the display and flower power of a single pot, but it works even better in beds and borders. Here you can layer together five or six different species in close proximity. A recipe that I use regularly sees a range of bulbs and tubers follow on from each other from February to October. Starting with snowdrops in February, the other species each take their turn. Dwarf daffodils emerge next in March, but just as they fade the muscari and tulips pop up among them to cover April. As these fade in early May *Allium* 'Purple Sensation' bursts forth, carrying its colour till the end of the month. Then tuberous *Mirabilis jalapa* emerges at great speed, hiding the faded bulb leaves

Popping up Match late-flowering echinacea with stalwarts such as *Verbena bonariensis*

Cyclamen hederifolium

Follow me Alliums come first here, but achillea and nepeta take the display through to autumn

Convallaria majalis

Big time Public gardens' displays can be quite grand, but the ideas often work at a smaller scale

Allium 'Purple Sensation'

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

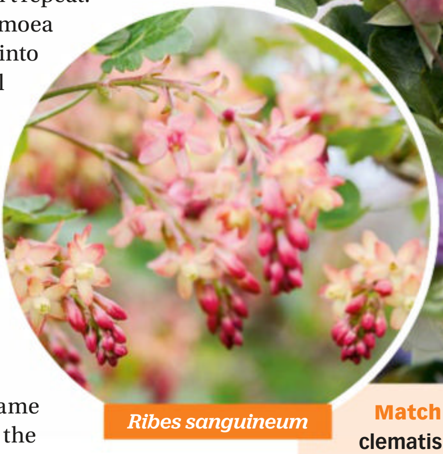
below it and flowering non-stop till the first frosts. So, that's nine months of successional display, just from bulbs and tubers.

Higher ground

Climbers are also suited to this approach. Pairing *Rosa* 'New Dawn' and *Clematis* 'Perle d' Azur' sees the clematis scramble through the rose, coming into bloom at around the same time, then remaining in flower to greet the rose's second flush six weeks later. Together they can flower from early summer to October. Annual climbers work well here, too, especially on rambling roses, which bloom early and don't repeat. But by growing an annual climber such as ipomoea through the stems of the rambler, it will come into bloom just as the rose stops and give colour till autumn. Spring shrubs such as ribes and forsythia can also provide a great frame. Planted at the base of either of these, *Eccremocarpus scaber*, which blooms from May to October, will quietly climb its host through spring, bursting into flower just as the shrub stops. This turns a shrub that only flowers for six weeks into one that starts the season one colour, then supports more blooms until autumn.

Successional planting can really up your game as a gardener, while making the most of even the smallest of spaces. Why not give it a try?

Ipomoea lobata



Ribes sanguineum

Match made in heaven Roses and summer-flowering clematis are the easiest successional combination of all

Nick's easy recipe for successional planting

Start with a multi-season evergreen such as *Nandina domestica*, which is always doing something, be it foliage, flower, berry or form, and add an annual climber such as *Ipomoea lobata* to its base to provide colour once the nandina has flowered but before it comes into berry. Next add in some perennial ground cover in the form of nepeta, underplanted with snowdrops, crocuses and *Iris reticulata*, which will bloom well before the nepeta emerges. And slot in a few colchicums for late colour.

Another one starts with *Hylotelephium* 'Matrona'. This has near year-round form and interest, but you can add in a successional element by underplanting with big alliums, whose unlovely leaves will be hidden by the hylotelephium. Add into the mix *Salvia confertiflora*. It doesn't flower till autumn, so flank its base with the squat, yellow-flowered scrambling version of *Dactylicapnos scandens*, which will cloak it in blooms before that. Also slot in long-flowering *Erigeron annuus* or *Verbena bonariensis*. These flower factories, both of which are gentle self-seeders, will keep the colour up from June to November while the others plants rise and fade. And finally, go for some early aquilegia, underplanted with *Mirabilis jalapa*. Just as the aquilegia starts to yellow in late May the mirabilis will emerge at great speed and produce night-scented flowers through summer and autumn.

Nepeta is a real long-termer in successional schemes, working with the later, shorter-lived colour of plants such as verbascum

BBC Gardeners' World Events

Gardeners' World Live (12-15 Jun)
Nick will appear every day.

NEXT MONTH Grow better veg with Nick's guide to edible companion planting

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

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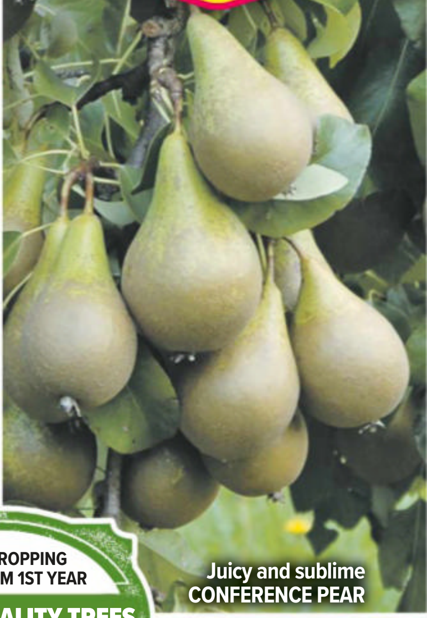

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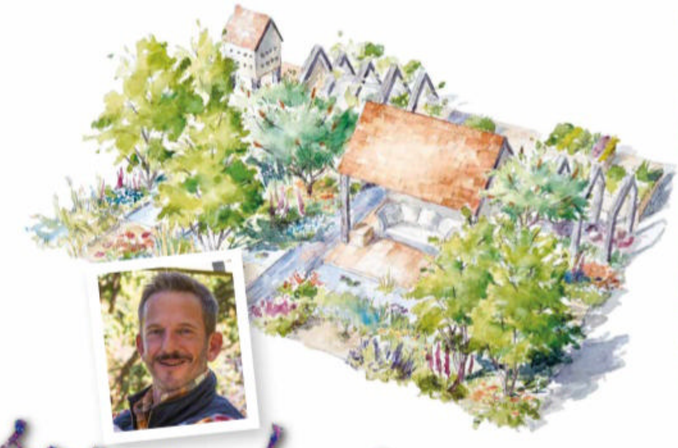

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Nick Bailey's headline Show Garden will bring the BBC Gardeners' World Magazine '**Make a Metre Matter**' campaign to life! With sustainability at its core, it offers inspiration on water conservation, composting, and reducing food miles. You can catch Nick's contagious inspiration in daily talks on the Theatre in discussion with Magazine editor **Kevin Smith**, a must-see for all eco-conscious gardeners. Plus, see award-winning designer **Pip Probert's inspiring one metre** pollinator patch, pond, and compost heap, plus **metres that matter** to mark 25 years of charity, Greenfingers.

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Let's Talk Plants

See Sue Kent on Thu 12 June

Plant tips, on tap! ▲

As well as shopping in the **Floral Marquee**, you'll be able to learn from the best in the business. Drop in at the **Let's Talk Plants** Stage hosted by **David Hurrion**, get 1 to 1 advice from the **Plant Experts** and top tips from the nursery owners. Plus, a chance to relax in the **Customer Lounge** for policy holders with Marquee sponsor, Legal & General.

Stars of the show ▲

Book seats in the Theatre with an all-star line-up of Monty Don and the *Gardeners' World* team. Plus, Michael Perry and Pip Probert in British Garden Centres' sponsor sessions. Book your seats today!**

Book your tickets

Si King joins Adam on Fri 13 June

Adam Frost and friends ▲

Inspired by his Chef's Table Show Garden last year, Adam returns with a line-up of chefs and experts including **James Martin**, **Si King** and the **Good Food** team, to chat cuisine and cultivation at the **Tasting Table**. Drop-by for entertaining talks, cooking fun and seasonal growing tips.

Browse and buy stunning plants

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Step into a world of orchids in the **Floral Marquee**! Orchids bring colour and elegance into the home, and this is a chance to see unusual varieties up close, with expert growers on hand to share tips on care and display. More annual favourites return too including **Hot Off The Potting Bench** new plants display and the **Wool Pots' Pot Swap**.

Get design and planting ideas for your garden

It's inspiration o'clock! ▲

With the expertise and shopping all in hand, it's time to get great ideas from Show Gardens including **QVC's Reflective Retreat**, **APL Avenue**, and space-savvy **Beautiful Borders** including **Lego Border** and more!

SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

IN CONVERSATION WITH

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Climate change

Who can you trust?

In a world where misinformation is proliferating, what does the changing climate mean for people, plants and gardens? **Darryl Moore** investigates

Floods are predicted to become more common in the UK

The recent LA area wildfires caused huge destruction

> “As gardeners we see the variations in important events in the lifecycle of plants, such as when leaves emerge and fall, flowers bloom and seeds set”

The procession of extreme weather events wreaking devastation across the planet in 2024 and early 2025 could be an indication of a new normal. The floods in Valencia and wildfires in the Los Angeles area are stories that made headlines in the UK, while heatwaves, extreme drought, hurricanes and blizzards affected many other regions of the world. Devastating heat was experienced in Myanmar in April 2024, with record temperatures of 48.2°C reportedly causing nearly 1,500 heat-stroke fatalities, and the BBC reported that at least 1,301 died in Saudi Arabia during the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in June 2024, when temperatures topped 50°C. Also that month, torrential rainfall in Bangladesh caused landslides killing at least nine people, and floods that affected 2 million people.

Scientific consensus is clear that these are due to human activities. The ‘greenhouse effect’ in the atmosphere explains how gases such as carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane, nitrous oxide and water vapour trap heat radiated from the planet’s surface. This is what keeps our planet at a liveable temperature. However, these gases have been accumulating rapidly since the Industrial Revolution, particularly CO_2, due to the burning of fossil fuels, resulting in the warming world and extreme weather we are experiencing.

As gardeners we are well placed to notice these changes, such as the hot, dry summer of 2022, and the warm, wet winter of 2023-24. We see the variations in the timing of important events in the lifecycle of plants, such as when leaves emerge and fall, flowers bloom and seeds set. Earlier springs and warmer autumns are contributing to the decline of UK wildlife species, which depend on the timings of these things for food and habitat when they most need them. A northerly migration of species is being seen, which is bringing with it new challenges in the form of pests and diseases previously unknown in the UK. These issues are being addressed by organisations such as DEFRA and the RHS, working with scientists to provide advice to gardeners on how to deal with such concerns.

A global problem

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was established in 1992 to address the changing climate within an international framework, and has organised the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) summits, hosted by different countries. At COP21 in 2015, the Paris Agreement was formalised as a legally binding international treaty with the goal of holding ‘the increase in the global

Darryl Moore is a landscape designer and author of *Gardening in a Changing World: Plants, People and the Climate Crisis*

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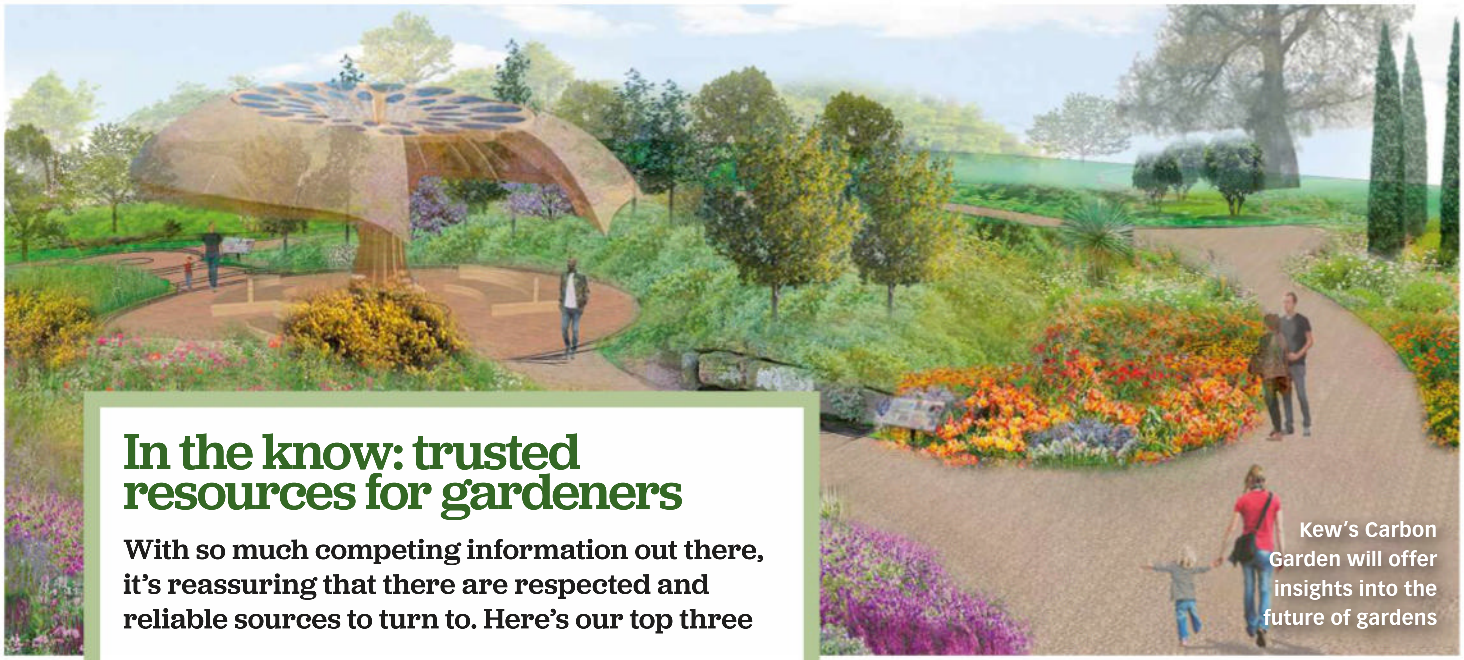

Kew's Carbon Garden will offer insights into the future of gardens

average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels' and pursue efforts 'to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels'.

The agreement has been put in jeopardy recently after US President Donald Trump withdrew the US from it, alongside enacting other executive orders aimed at derailing climate change solutions. Respected activist, journalist and author Bill McKibben says: "Trump's team made clear that they would like to dismantle the fundamental bulwarks of climate science, for instance, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which measures temperatures and carbon in the air, because they underpin 'climate alarmism,' and are impediments to the fossil fuel industry."

As the US is the second largest source of greenhouse gases, responsible for 12 per cent of global emissions, this is a significant blow to making necessary reductions and provides an excuse for other countries to renege on their commitments. As Eric Holthaus, meteorologist and author of *The Future Earth* says, "That makes it easier for people with bad intentions or financial interests to discount climate science."

This is concerning, as the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated that to achieve the goals, global CO_2 emissions need to fall by nearly half by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050. Recent international debates have focused on how to do this in an

In the know: trusted resources for gardeners

With so much competing information out there, it's reassuring that there are respected and reliable sources to turn to. Here's our top three

■ Royal Horticultural Society

Recycling has become a theme at RHS Chelsea Flower Shows

In 2017 the RHS published a report, *Gardening in a Changing Climate,* based on collaboration with the University of Sheffield and University of Reading, and using the results of an extensive survey of amateur gardeners and interviews with industry professionals. Highlighting the importance of our gardens in the context of climate change, it suggests ways to adapt gardens through considered plant choices and garden design, as well as how to enhance carbon sequestration and flood alleviation. Results from a new survey conducted in 2024 will feed into updated research to keep gardeners up to speed on the latest information on climate change and best practices.

rhs.org.uk/climate-change

■ Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

In 2021, Kew Gardens launched a research programme looking at climate adaptation and mitigation by studying carbon storage and release in plants and soil, with the aim of influencing policy and informing gardeners. Kew is also studying the behaviour of bees and their interactions with both local and introduced plant species, as well as the wider role of pollinators. This year Kew will also be unveiling a Carbon Garden to champion gardeners' roles in making a difference, and to provide an example of what gardens in the near future may look like if climate change continues at its current rate.

kew.org/nature-unlocked

■ Met Office

As the national meteorological service in the UK, the Met Office is responsible for analysing weather and climate science data. It uses a vast observation network and supercomputing technology to provide accurate weather forecasts across the country, as well as modelling and predicting longer term changes in the climate system. Much of the information in the regular National Climate Projection assessments it produces is intended for specialists, and the data is used by organisations such as the RHS, but the infographics are useful for gardeners, giving indications of likely future changes in rainfall and temperature by region.

metoffice.gov.uk

Warm winter

■ January of 2025 was the warmest on record, with temperatures 1.75°C above the pre-industrial average. It was the 18th in a 19-month period in which the global-average surface air temperature was more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

PHOTOS: RGB KEW/RICHARD WILFORD; ZOE MAXWELL

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equitable manner, as most emissions are from economically and industrially developed regions such as North America and Europe, yet the most extreme repercussions are felt in less economically developed or newly industrialising regions in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia. “Climate impacts are already destroying livelihoods and lives, particularly in low-emitting, climate-vulnerable communities, predominantly comprising people of colour,” says Kevin Anderson, Professor of Energy and Climate Change at the University of Manchester.

Over the limit

Progress to reduce emissions has been slow, and with data from the EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service showing temperatures already reaching 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level in 2024, the targets of the Paris Agreement are looking unlikely to be met. The UN *Emissions Gap Report 2024* suggests that following current policies may result in 3.1°C by the end of the century. The lack of action is partly due to a tacit acceptance by world leaders of what is known as overshoot, whereby the limits are temporarily exceeded before being reduced to the prescribed levels by the end of the century. This requires large-scale CO_2 removal technologies, which are either currently undeveloped or unproven at the necessary scale. This is a risky strategy. “We need to get to net zero, then keep going. This doesn’t currently seem very likely, as very few governments have offered to be significant net removers of greenhouse gases. It’s possible that simply being globally greenhouse gas-neutral is enough for a mild overshoot, however this still requires a higher level of commitment to net zero than is currently offered,” says Dr Robin Lamboll, Research Fellow at Imperial College, London.

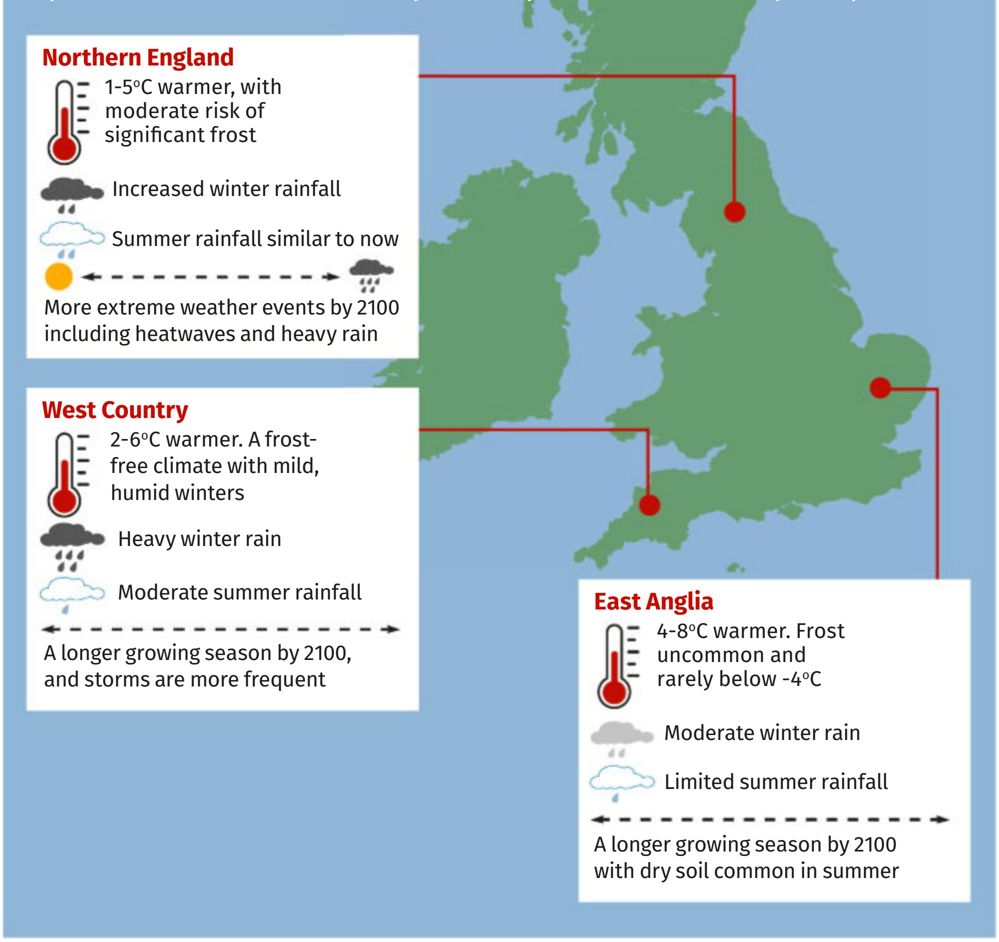
The dangers of denial

The majority of climate scientists are in general consensus about the future, but their voices are not being heard. Climate change denial has long been a tactic to undermine scientific authority and in the past has been used by the fossil fuel industry to discredit research revealing the damaging consequences of burning their products. As public awareness of the climate crisis increased, denial appeared to be waning, but a recent resurgence has sown more confusion, dividing and polarising people. “What is happening now is the culmination of a trend that has been going on for a long time. Now it has erupted, full-blown,” says Naomi Oreskes, Professor of the History of Science at Harvard University and co-author of *Merchants of Doubt*.

Misinformation and deliberate disinformation have proliferated online and in social media, elevating opinions at the expense of science, making it increasingly difficult to know where to look for sound advice.

A changing landscape

Scientists previously thought that our future climate would be Mediterranean, but the 2017 RHS report Gardening in a Changing Climate tells a different story of more unpredictable conditions across the UK by 2100. The question is, will we be ready to adapt?



Northern England

1-5°C warmer, with moderate risk of significant frost

Increased winter rainfall

Summer rainfall similar to now

More extreme weather events by 2100 including heatwaves and heavy rain

West Country

2-6°C warmer. A frost-free climate with mild, humid winters

Heavy winter rain

Moderate summer rainfall

A longer growing season by 2100, and storms are more frequent

East Anglia

4-8°C warmer. Frost uncommon and rarely below -4°C

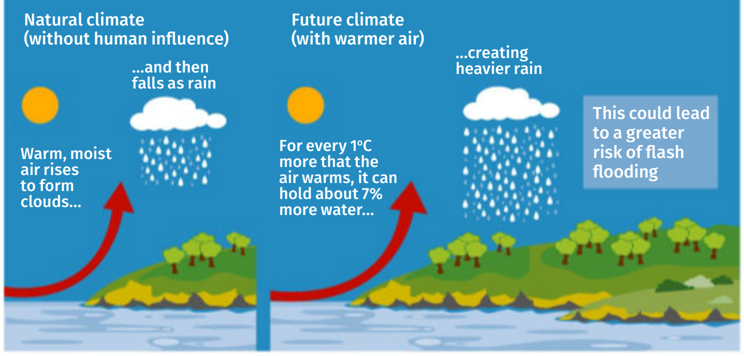
Moderate winter rain

Limited summer rainfall

A longer growing season by 2100 with dry soil common in summer

The flood risk factor

As air temperature rises, so does the risk of heavier rain and potential flooding – already having devastating effects globally.


Natural climate (without human influence)
...and then falls as rain
Warm, moist air rises to form clouds...
Future climate (with warmer air)
...creating heavier rain
For every 1°C more that the air warms, it can hold about 7% more water...
This could lead to a greater risk of flash flooding

Year record

■ 2024 was the first calendar year to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels

High and dry

■ By the 2030s in the UK, more areas will become arid, with a significant increase in risks from dry soils and drought, including heat stress to plants

Woody plants offer shelter and shade

Ponds are an easy way to boost garden wildlife

Gardening for the future

We can all make a big difference, one garden at a time

The crisis is daunting, but thinking globally and acting locally is a way to do something meaningful. Phoebe Barnard, Affiliate Professor at the University of Washington's Center for Environmental Politics, suggests: "In these times of spiralling risk, distrust and system breakdown, one of the best safeguards for biodiversity and ecosystems are schemes that support local conservation."

This applies to what we do in our gardens, where making the right decisions about the plants and materials we use can help lower emissions and reduce the valuable resources we use in them. "The more carbon and water we store, the more we prevent disaster, one garden at a time," says wildlife expert, author and *GW* Wildlife Editor Kate Bradbury. "We can prevent flooding and fire in one go by digging a pond, and reduce the effects of wind by planting hedges or dense shrubs to create a shelter belt for ourselves and wildlife. Create shade to reduce temperatures and grow native plants to support nature. Compost plant and food waste to reduce the amount sent to landfill, where it releases greenhouse gases," she adds.

Integrating planting into urban areas can reduce flood risks

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM; DARRYL MOORE

> *"Devoting as much of the garden as possible to plants sequesters carbon dioxide"*

Maximising planting is beneficial as plants play an important role, absorbing CO_2 while in growth. "Devoting as much of the garden as possible to plants with a diverse collection of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, maintained veganically with a light touch, no-dig approach, will not only sequester carbon but also provide habitat for all manner of lifeforms," says garden designer Cleve West.

Hard decisions

Striking a balance between planting and hard landscaping is important, too. Rachel Bailey, garden designer and a spokesperson for the Society of Garden and Landscape Designers, says: "Aiming for 80 per cent planting and 20 per cent hard landscaping is a good target. Layered planting will protect soil and help store carbon in the soil as well as in plant tissues. Densely layered planting will also help water to soak into the soil following extreme weather events, reducing the burden on drainage systems, as well as creating a haven for wildlife above and below ground."

The CO_2 from making and transporting new materials can be avoided through reusing things. Also, planting into growing media containing recycled aggregates provides ideal low-nutrient conditions for drought-tolerant plants suited to warmer temperatures and provides quick drainage during heavy rainfall. Understanding the origins and natural habitats of plants helps in choosing ones that will thrive in such growing media. In public spaces, similar 'soils' are used in rain gardens, which absorb water from streets and pavements in heavy rain while also looking great.

The carbon cycle is an important part of life on earth, but we need to make sure carbon is going where we need it, into plants and soil, not the atmosphere. Climate-conscious gardening means thinking about the big picture and doing what we can in our own spaces. Every plant helps in shaping a liveable future.

Wetter days

■ UK winters will become significantly wetter, and an increase in intense, short–duration rainfall during the summer is expected to cause serious problems with flash flooding

Commitment to transition

Recently a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative has been established in a global effort to foster international cooperation to accelerate a transition to renewable energy for everyone. Participants include 131 cities and sub-national governments, the World Health Organisation and healthcare professionals, international organisations, academics and scientists. As a platform it gives a space to many groups to voice their commitment to a future free of fossil fuels. Perhaps horticultural organisations could show their commitment, too? ***fossilfueltreaty.org***

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PHOTO: DAHLIA 'RAINBOW SILENCE' (GETTY/ALEX MANDERS)

> “We want easy-care plants that flower all summer and come in many colours”

The People’s Choice: New dahlias

Visitors to RHS Garden Wisley’s dahlia trial have voted for their favourites, so let **Tom Brown** inspire your planting picks with a gallery of future classics

As summer approaches, we start to think about which plants we can add to our pots and borders that will reliably provide lots of colour. We want plants that flower all summer, are easy to care for and come in many colours. I’ll let you into a secret; that perfect plant has been under your nose all along.

Dahlias can be easily grown from tubers, cuttings or seeds, none of which are expensive to buy and they’re all easy to obtain from garden centres or online.

Planting perfection

Here are a few more reasons to give these easy-going plants a go:

- Flowers from July till first frost.
- Can be overwintered in the ground with a little protection.
- Pretty much every colour and shape of flower is out there.
- Single dahlias with their exposed pollen and nectar are wonderful food sources for insect pollinators.

RHS Wisley Garden conducted a trial over two years to establish the best of the bunch of recently introduced dahlias, through the observations of a panel of gardeners and growers, of which I was a member. At the same time as carrying out this rigorous trial, the RHS invited visitors to the garden to vote for the dahlias they most admired. We’ve gathered the crucial facts about the dahlias picked out by visitors and here’s the shortlist. Your job is simply to choose your favourite to grow at home! The full results of the RHS trial will be announced in May.

Dahlias are herbaceous perennials, originating from Mexico, and can be categorised into distinct groups. All the favourite visitor dahlias were from the following groups:

- Collerette dahlias
- Decorative dahlias
- Ball dahlias
- Pompon dahlias
- Semi-cactus dahlias
- Fimbriated dahlias
- Double orchid dahlias

The gallery of People's Choice favourites

'Great Silence'

Deservedly the most popular dahlia in the public vote due to the sheer quantity of warm-pink flowers with a golden centre on long, dark stems. Perfect for cutting, with incredibly prolific, luminous blooms and healthy foliage. *Group 5: decorative.* **Available from Farmer Gracy, Rose Cottage Plants, Peter Nyssen**

'Fire Mountain'

A tower of healthy, bronze foliage stood proudly without a hint of mildew. Small, postbox-red flowers appear in late summer to contrast with the leaves. Noteworthy for its vigour and healthy foliage, and ideal placed in exotic planting schemes. *Group 5: decorative.* **Available from Proctor's Nursery, Cotswold Garden Flowers**

'Jennifer Mary Ellen'

This dahlia stood out from the crowd not only because of its sultry flowers, offset with bronze leaves, but also because it didn't need staking. A compact growth habit makes this dahlia suitable for pots and the front of a border. *Group 5: decorative.* **Available from Farmer Gracy, Peter Nyssen, Rose Cottage Plants**

'Bettina Verbeek'

This cracking dahlia is definitely one for the 'in your face' crowd. Red florets with bright yellow margins almost looked electrically charged, demanding attention, and votes from the visiting public put this one in the top three. The unashamedly intense flowers made this one of my favourites, too. *Group 5: decorative.* **Currently unavailable in the UK**

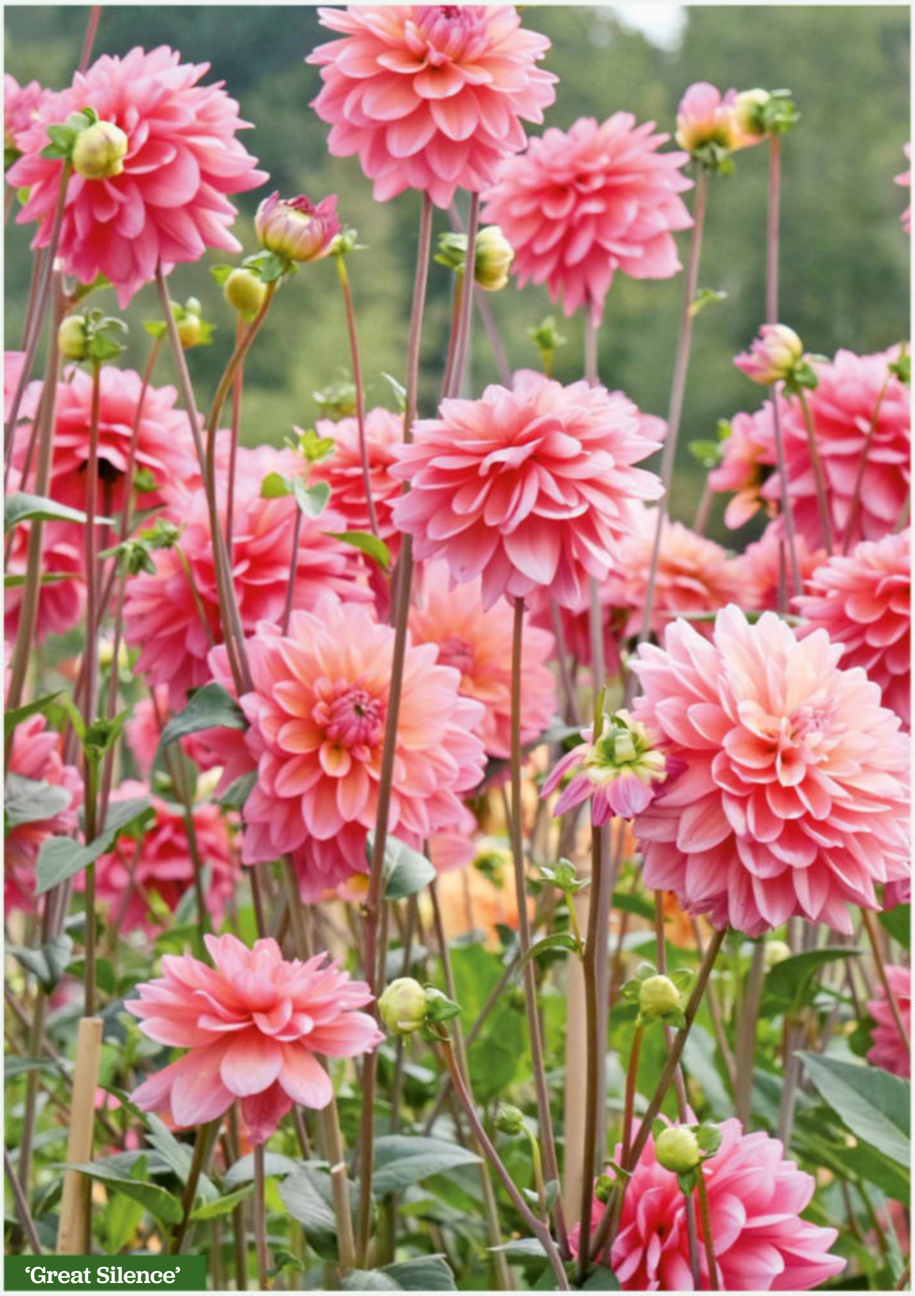
'Ashpire Fancy'

The intricacies of the cream, red and pale yellow flowers not only make this dahlia popular with pollinators, florists and exhibitors, but also the voting public. Due to its multifaceted colour palette, this dahlia has the versatility to sit comfortably in most planting styles or grown solely for its cutting qualities. *Group 3: collerette.* **Available from JRG Dahlias**

'Melissa Anna Marijke'

Deep-pink centres, radiating out to a lighter tone, made this dahlia incredibly popular with visitors. An unusual dahlia that grew to just under 1m in height. Its relatively compact growth habit makes this dahlia a perfect contender for smaller gardens. *Group 5: decorative.* **Available from Ashridge Trees, Peter Nyssen, Rose Cottage Plants**

PHOTOS: GETTY/ALEX MANDERS



'Great Silence'

'Cornwall Island'

Like many of the fimbriated types, these maroon-purple flowers take on a shaggy or fuzzy appearance. Dahlias are fun to grow, and you can't help but smile when enjoying these flowers, borne on dark stems and perfect for cutting. *Group 11: fimbriated.* **Available from Shaw Green Dahlias, Peter Nyssen, Sarah Raven**

'Rainbow Silence'

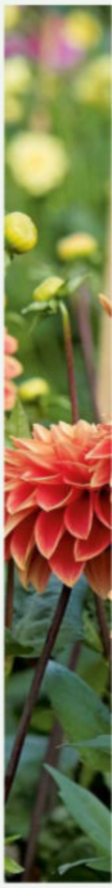
Not only one of the most vibrant and jazzy dahlias in the trial but one of the most vigorous, so it was no surprise that this was among the favourites for public and judges alike. Reddish-pink petals that fade into a yellow centre. *Group 5: decorative.* **Available from Flowers by Flourish**

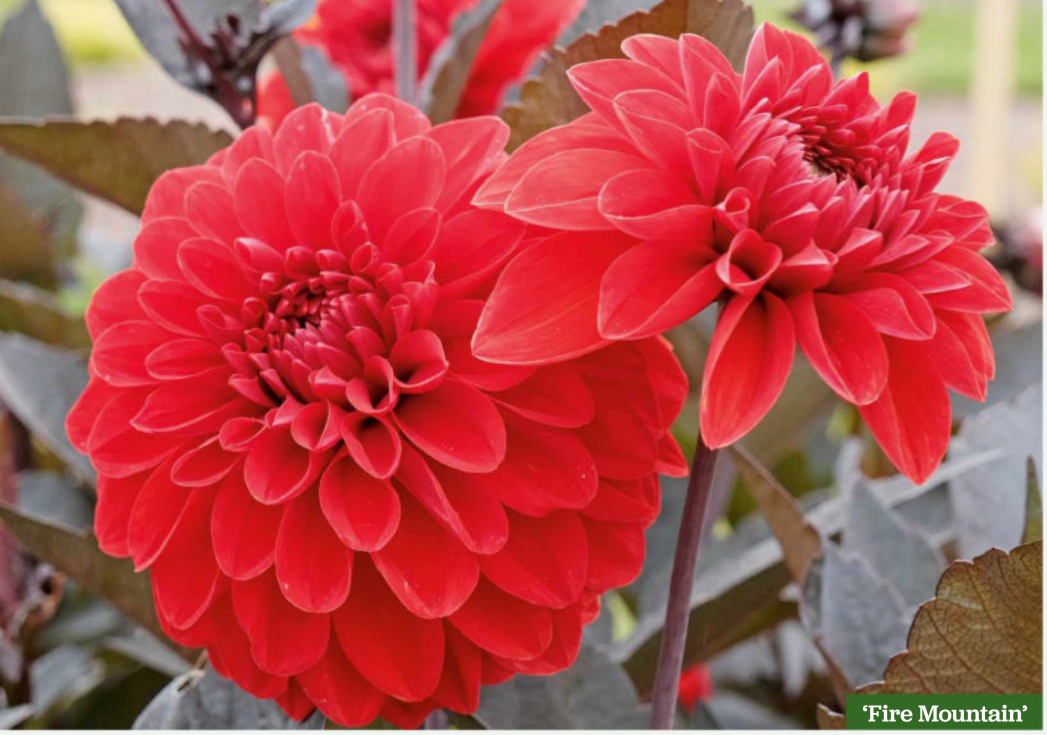
'Ryecroft Jill'

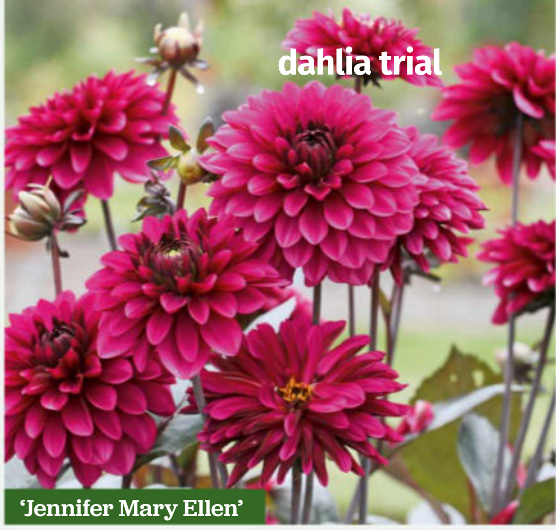
An abundance of soft-orange, rounded flowers, full of petals on strong stems not only made this variety a favourite of the public but also inspired me to plant it in my garden. Healthy, bright green foliage sets off the apricot flowers beautifully. *Group 6: ball.* **Available from Halls of Heddon**

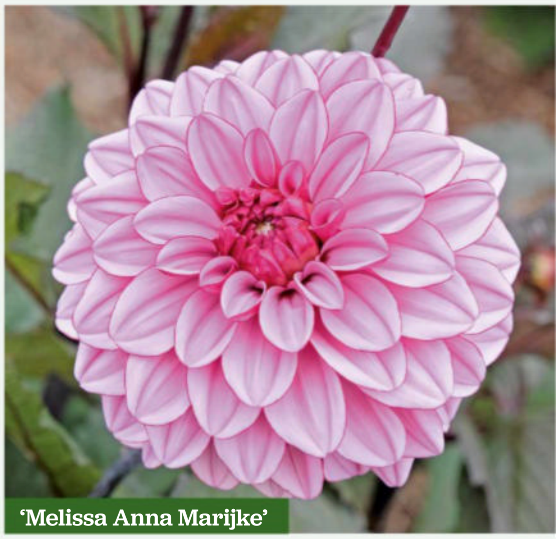
Labyrinth Two Tone

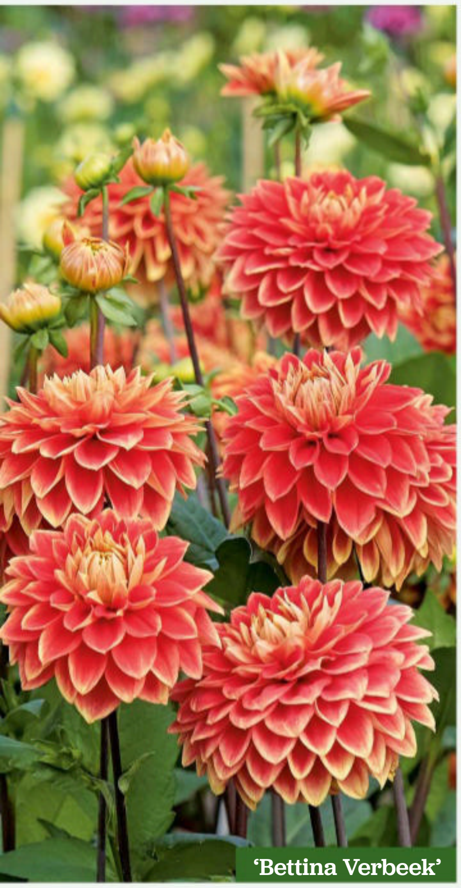
Whopping lilac and cream rippled flowers stood tall on sturdy stems, catching the eye of visitors. These dinnerplate-sized blooms aren't as plentiful as others on the favourites list but what they lack in numbers, they make up for in size. *Group 5: decorative.* **Available from Farmer Gracy, Peter Nyssen, Sarah Raven**

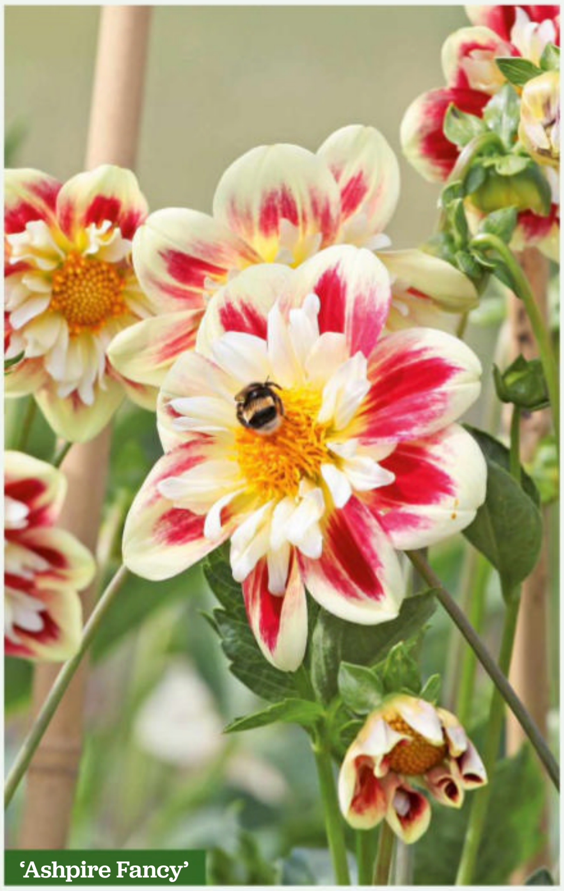


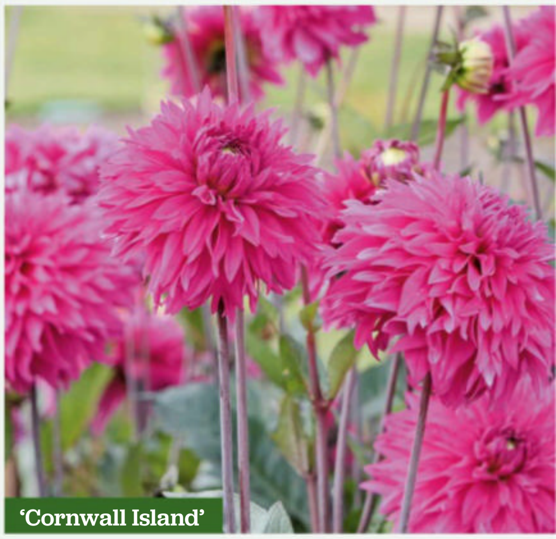

'Fire Mountain'


'Jennifer Mary Ellen'


'Melissa Anna Marijke'


'Bettina Verbeek'


'Ashpire Fancy'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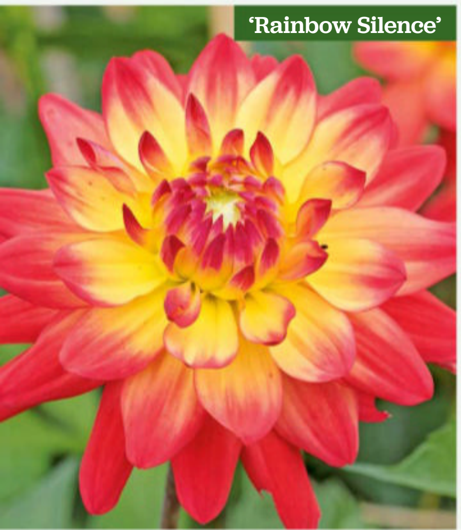
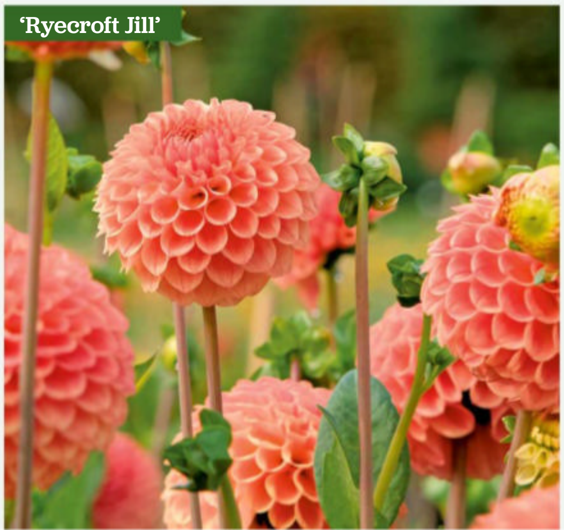
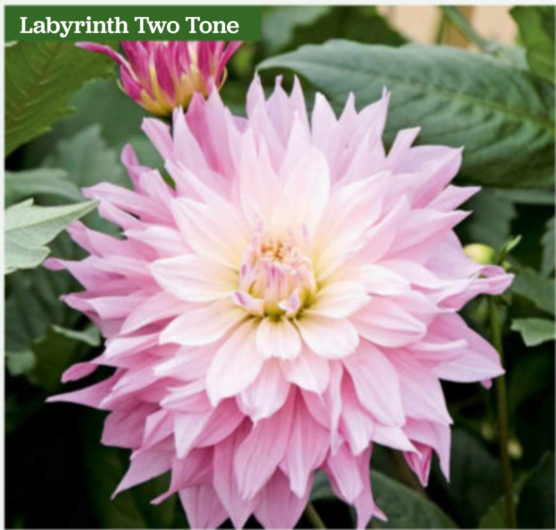

'Rainbow Silence'


'Ryecroft Jill'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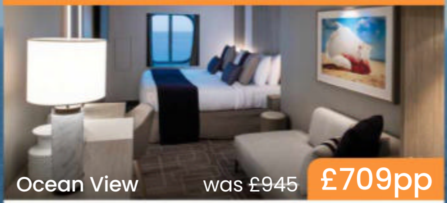

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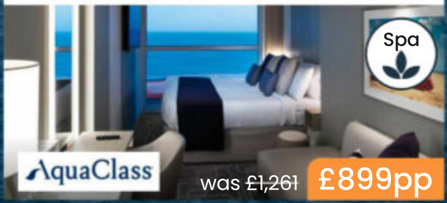

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'Lemon Sherbet'

'Milena F'

'Molly Raven'

'Eye Candy'

'Night Silence'

'Lemon Sherbet' (Sweet Candy Series)

The vibrancy of the citrussy yellow flowers made this dahlia a firm favourite with the visiting public, performing consistently well over the course of the summer season. The open centres make this variety popular with flower arrangers, and top of the list for bees, too. *Group 3: collerette.*
Available from Hayloft Plants, Proctor's Nursery, Telegraph Garden Shop

'Milena F'

The range of colours within a bloom as it matures gave this dahlia variety some real star quality. The nod to apricots, pinks and yellows adds a certain level of versatility – or perhaps it's the colour-association with fruit-salad sweets that gives it the edge. *Group 5: decorative.*
Available from Shaw Green Dahlias, Waitrose, Crocus

'Molly Raven'

The combination of darker foliage and multi-toned flowers on dark stems made this dahlia a hit with the visitors. With no need for staking, this branched, multi-stemmed dahlia will be perfect in a large pot surrounded by equally sultry plants. *Group 5: decorative.*
Available from The Old Vineyard, Sarah Raven

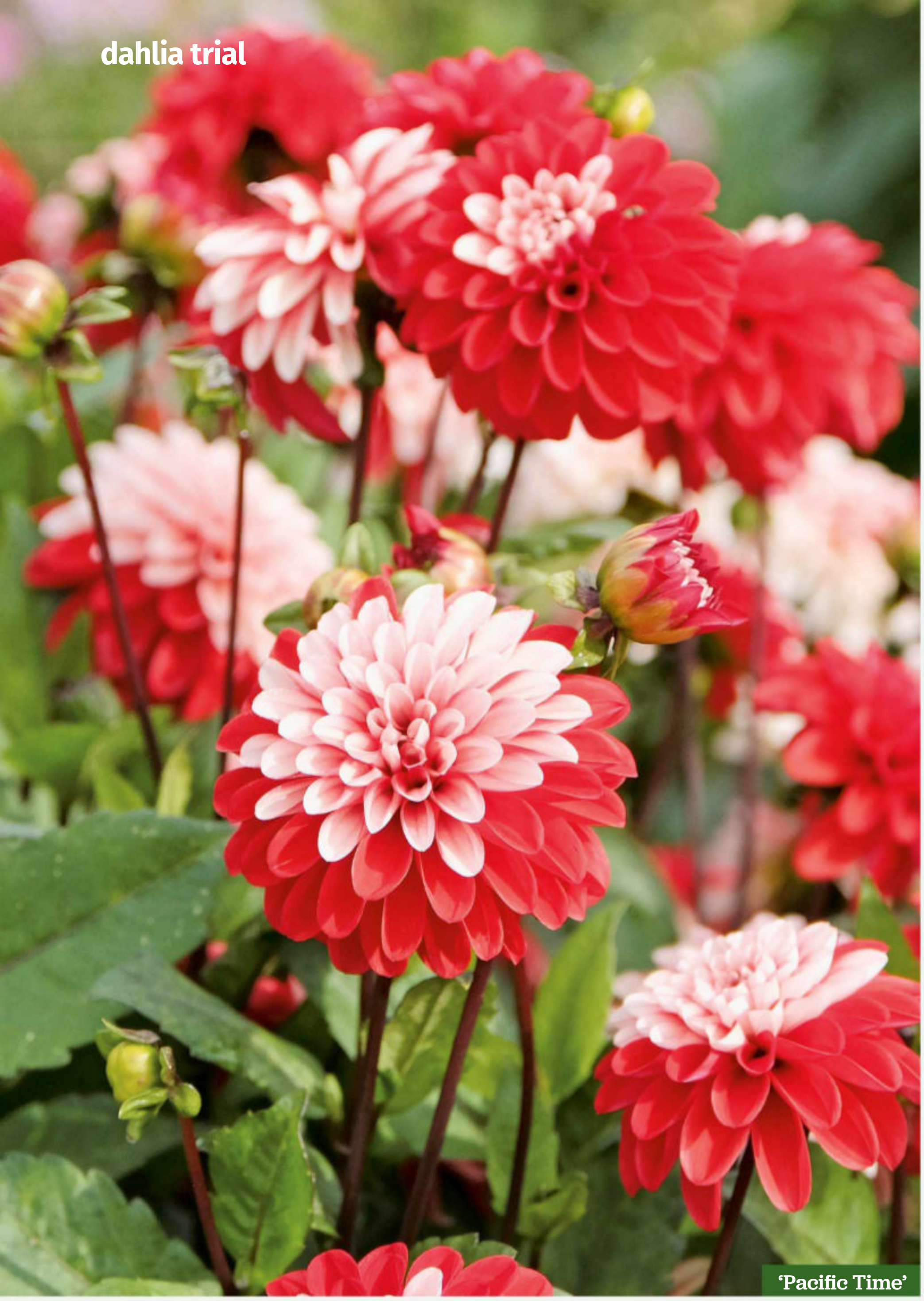
'Eye Candy'

Although it's hard not to be bowled over by this variety's hot, jazzy colours in the late summer, 'Eye Candy' found favour with visitors for its soft, pink pompon flowers. Beautiful lilac tones can be found within the blooms, with plenty of buds waiting in the wings. *Group 5: decorative.*
Available from Halls of Heddon

'Night Silence'

This extremely unusual dahlia was voted as one of the visiting public's absolute favourites for its ability to stand out from the crowd. Free-flowering with dusky pink blooms and bronze foliage, this variety provides a perfect subject for container displays with a contemporary edge. *Group 5: decorative.*
Available from Farmer Gracy, Sarah Raven, Rose Cottage Plants

PHOTOS: GETTY/ALEX MANDERS


'Pacific Time'

'Copperboy'

'Dutch Delight'

'Meteorite'

'Pacific Time'

For those who can't decide between a red or white dahlia then fear not as this one has flowers with both colours. Vibrant, compact plants demanded that visitors stop in their tracks, producing lots of flowers over the summer. *Group 5: decorative.*

Available from Shaw Green Dahlias, Peter Nyssen

'Copperboy'

A very trendy dahlia due to those quite gorgeous burnt-orange flowers with chocolate-coloured centres that fade beautifully. Relatively small in stature but admired by all, myself included, which is why I have given this dahlia a space in my garden. *Group 6: ball.*

Available from Sarah Raven, Farmer Gracy, Rose Cottage Plants

'Dutch Delight'

Curved petals of fuchsia-pink with a warm, yellow centre give this dahlia an edge, especially for flower arrangers, as this recent introduction is perfect for cutting. Reaching a height of around 90cm, this dahlia is incredibly versatile in gardens of all sizes. *Group 13: double orchid.*

Available from Webbs Garden Centres, Rose Cottage Plants, Sarah Raven

'Meteorite'

Sunglasses at the ready for this one. Bright yellow flowers contrast against dark foliage, making this variety almost impossible to ignore. Not one for lovers of the subtle and sultry, but wonderfully exuberant and to be universally admired. *Group 5: decorative.*

Available from Ashridge Trees, Rose Cottage Plants

Voting for the People's Choice dahlias

Visitors to RHS Garden Wisley were able to vote for their favourite during August and September 2024, choosing from the 94 entries on display in a fair, unbiased system. Voters were also encouraged to let the RHS know why those dahlias stood out to them that day. Votes were collected via QR code and then added up at the end of the summer. This approach worked well, which means that many more RHS plant trials will adopt this form of information gathering in 2025. The results of the main RHS trial with new Awards of Garden Merit will be published by the RHS next month.

PHOTOS: GETTY/ISABELLE MORAND, ALEX MANDERS

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Talk all things spring

From growing veggies to budget savvy projects, host **Adam Kirtland** gets to the heart of spring gardening at the revitalised **In Conversation With Stage**. Plus, the NEW **Spring Table** adds a new dimension to the Fair with **The Pig's** cocktail masterclasses and **Lime Wood Hotel** tastings. Drop by to listen in, or book a seat to take part!

DOGS ON LEADS WELCOME

Make a Metre Matter

Ideas to make every metre matter!

Explore an inspiring series of small garden features packed with ways you can transform a metre as part of our new **Make a Metre Matter** campaign! Plus, get more plant and design ideas at the **Showcase Gardens**, **Beautiful Borders** and **College Competition Gardens**.

Fair highlights

GW MAGAZINE STAGE

Your Magazine editors welcome guests **Adam**, **Carol** and **Arit**. Plus, **David Hurrion** chats all things plants, a great way to pick up seasonal tips and techniques.

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Make a Metre Matter

Create a micro veg patch

Growing your own, even in a small space, can reduce your food miles and carbon footprint, while also helping wildlife in your garden. The key to growing eco-friendly crops is to use water, sunlight and your soil as effectively as possible, and to opt for natural, biodegradable or recycled products. By reusing containers, using peat-free and homemade compost, encouraging natural predators rather than spraying plants with pesticides, and saving your own seeds, you can fill your metre with delicious, sustainably grown veg.

Growing different veg close together increases biodiversity, helps deter pests and improves soil health. If you grow in a raised bed, you'll also benefit from warmer growing conditions in spring and some protection against floods and waterlogging. So even in a small garden, you can enjoy healthy homegrown veg through summer and beyond.

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

WIN! £1,000 in Crocus vouchers*

If you want to transform a metre to help the planet then register your participation at the address below. All participants will be entered in our prize draw and you could win first prize of £1,000 in Crocus vouchers, with two runners up each receiving £500 vouchers. Plus, everyone who registers will receive 20% off full-price plants at Crocus. Enter your metre space now at ***Gardeners World.com/ mamm***

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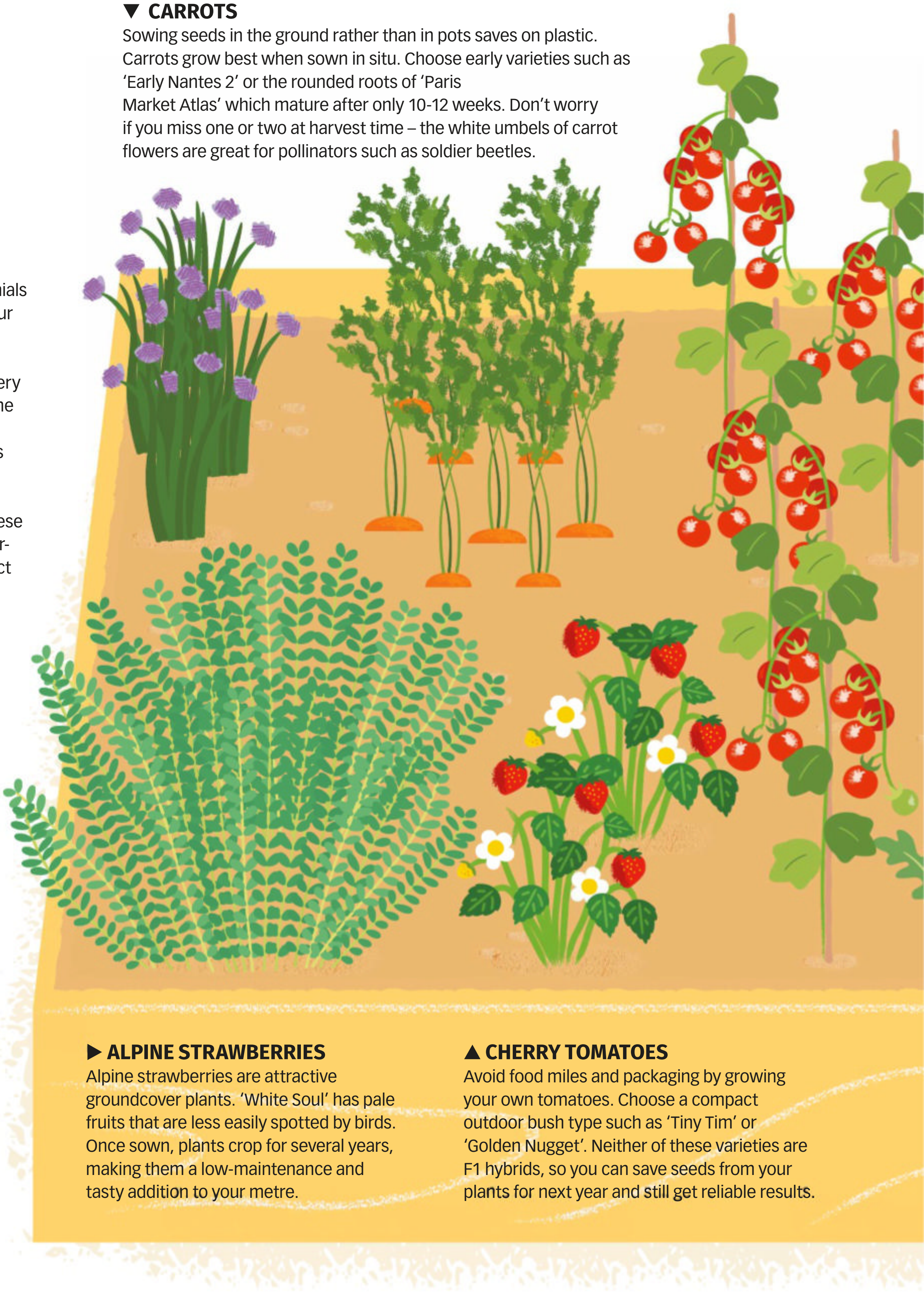
Space-savvy crops

Nic Wilson shares some space-saving crop ideas to grow in just one square metre. Think about the harvest from your mini veg plot – and what you would like to eat in the coming months



▼ CARROTS

Sowing seeds in the ground rather than in pots saves on plastic. Carrots grow best when sown in situ. Choose early varieties such as 'Early Nantes 2' or the rounded roots of 'Paris Market Atlas' which mature after only 10-12 weeks. Don't worry if you miss one or two at harvest time – the white umbels of carrot flowers are great for pollinators such as soldier beetles.

▶ CHIVES

Grow compact perennials like chives to make your plot more sustainable. Perennials don't need growing from seed every year, so they reduce the need for pots and compost. Garlic chives and Welsh onions are also great to grow in small spaces. All of these perennials have nectar-rich flowers that attract pollinating insects.

▶ THYME

Many Mediterranean herbs are ideal for a sunny spot. Thyme is a low-growing plant that thrives at the edge of a well-drained veg bed. It's drought-tolerant and grows well in poor soil, so there's no need to fertilise or water once it's settled in. The evergreen leaves can be picked all year, and honeybees and hoverflies love the summer flowers.

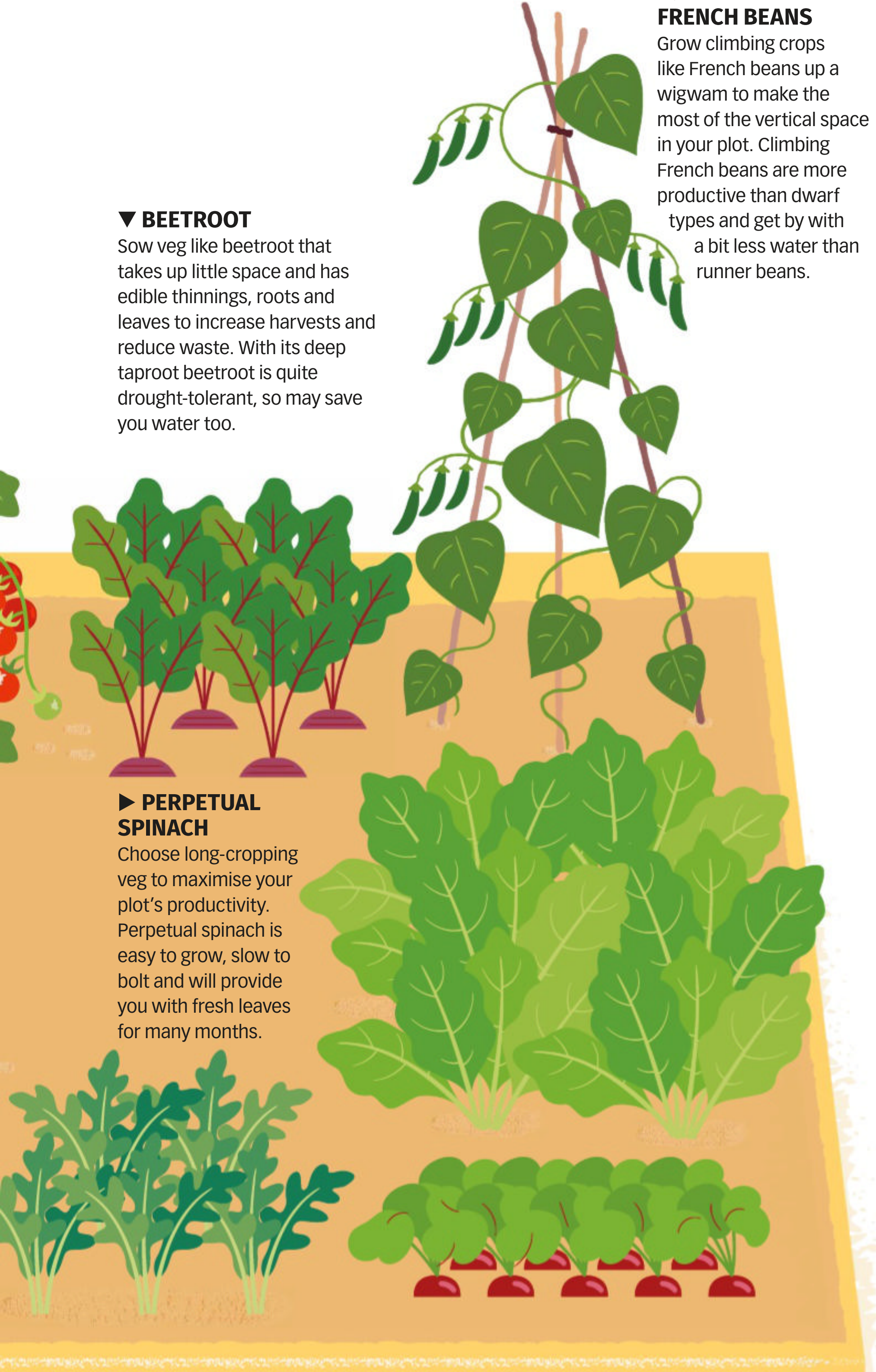
▶ ALPINE STRAWBERRIES

Alpine strawberries are attractive groundcover plants. 'White Soul' has pale fruits that are less easily spotted by birds. Once sown, plants crop for several years, making them a low-maintenance and tasty addition to your metre.

▲ CHERRY TOMATOES

Avoid food miles and packaging by growing your own tomatoes. Choose a compact outdoor bush type such as 'Tiny Tim' or 'Golden Nugget'. Neither of these varieties are F1 hybrids, so you can save seeds from your plants for next year and still get reliable results.

ILLUSTRATION: IAN CUNLIFFE



▼ BEETROOT

Sow veg like beetroot that takes up little space and has edible thinnings, roots and leaves to increase harvests and reduce waste. With its deep taproot beetroot is quite drought-tolerant, so may save you water too.

◀ CLIMBING FRENCH BEANS

Grow climbing crops like French beans up a wigwam to make the most of the vertical space in your plot. Climbing French beans are more productive than dwarf types and get by with a bit less water than runner beans.

▶ PERPETUAL SPINACH

Choose long-cropping veg to maximise your plot's productivity. Perpetual spinach is easy to grow, slow to bolt and will provide you with fresh leaves for many months.

▲ ROCKET

Cut-and-come-again leaves are picked in small amounts over several weeks. Rocket can be sown in situ and, if you leave some to flower, not only will it benefit insects, but it often self-seeds next year, saving effort and resources.

▲ RADISH

Sow quick-maturing veg like radish between slower crops such as beetroot. By the time the beets need more space your radishes will be ready to eat. Intercropping reduces your overall use of space and water.

Dos & don'ts

- ✓ Do avoid digging wherever possible to retain stored carbon and allow networks of mycorrhizal fungi to develop.
- ✓ Do add some perennial crops, which require fewer resources and are more able to withstand challenging weather conditions.
- ✓ Do reuse pots or source them second-hand.
- ✓ Do mulch your bed with garden compost to retain moisture, improve soil structure and boost soil microorganisms.
- ✓ Do make your own nettle and comfrey fertiliser instead of buying fertilisers that use fossil fuels in their production.
- ✓ Do let a few vegetable plants flower to provide food for pollinating insects.
- ✓ Do choose vegetables that suit the soil and aspect of your plot so they grow well and produce bumper crops.
- ✓ Do collect rainwater and use it efficiently.

- ✗ Don't grow vegetables you dislike, or they'll go to waste.
- ✗ Don't use peat-based compost for seedlings – otherwise you're contributing to the destruction of vital carbon-storing habitats.
- ✗ Don't use pesticides on your plot – instead encourage natural predators like frogs, ground beetles and ladybirds.
- ✗ Don't grow F1 varieties if you want to collect your own seeds and reduce your use of resources – they won't reliably produce the same variety of plant next year.
- ✗ Don't just garden your plot in the summer – keep it covered year-round with crops or green manure to protect the soil and lock up carbon.

Make a Metre Matter

Next month

How to make an easy **pond for wildlife** in one metre of space

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Regular saving is helping Gray and Matthew add to the magic they've created in their chapel garden, near Hay-on-Wye

Spring is a favourite time of year for Gray Nolan, 49, and Matthew Robert Hughes, 45, at Chapel on the Green, their converted chapel in Glasbury, near Hay-on-Wye. These months bring the tulips that fill the pots and border beds, creating the cottage-garden effect of the chapel's walled grounds. "It's only a small space but it's perfectly formed," says Gray. "It's a garden of pockets."

When they moved to the area from London in 2016, Gray, a yoga instructor, and Matthew, an artist, initially rented the chapel. "We started to put our own touches on the interiors. Eventually, we decided to buy it," explains Gray. "The garden was tarmac and slate – very 80s. There wasn't a single plant."

He and Matthew now run the chapel as a guest house, yoga studio and retreat destination. Guests come throughout the year to reconnect with nature, swim in the nearby River Wye, and practise yoga. Making sure that the garden adds something to their guests' experience at the chapel is important – but not cheap.

The nature of their living can make saving a bit of a challenge: "We're both self-employed and our work is very seasonal," explains Gray. "I try to get income as regularly as possible – from deposits for retreats and so on. I put aside pots of money and I have a regular Direct Debit each month into a savings account."

When the business gets a windfall, such as a large contract, Gray can afford to put away more into savings, so it's useful to have online access to their savings account. After that, though, he prefers to ignore that money and pretend it's not there. "And I don't tell Matthew it's there, either!" he laughs.

Small garden magic

To make the space more functional for guests, Gray and Matthew are saving to have a covered seating area built into the east-facing side of the garden.

"We have some garden furniture but nothing big enough for everyone in the property to sit together. And we do a lot of retreats in winter," explains Gray. "We'd love to have a proper seating area."

A covered seating nook, close to the fern beds and the willow tree, would enable larger groups to dine together outdoors all year round. "Our favourite thing is for a guest to disappear to read a book in a hidden corner of the garden," says Matthew.

The garden has always been a labour of love. When the couple began working on it in 2020, limited budget and Covid restrictions meant doing a lot of the heavy lifting themselves, pulling up old tarmac beneath slate shingle with pickaxes to clear space for raised beds.

As they had little gardening experience, it was a learning curve. "I didn't know what I was doing at the start. I just chose plants I liked," says Matthew. "Over time, I've learned how gardens change throughout the year, what thrives in the environment and what doesn't, and which varieties are a good investment because they come back year after year."

Spending less on new plants each year means they can save more for the bigger projects. Longer term, they would also like to add a sauna. "We get a mobile sauna to come when we run wild-swimming retreats in the colder months," says Gray. "But our own sauna would be incredible."

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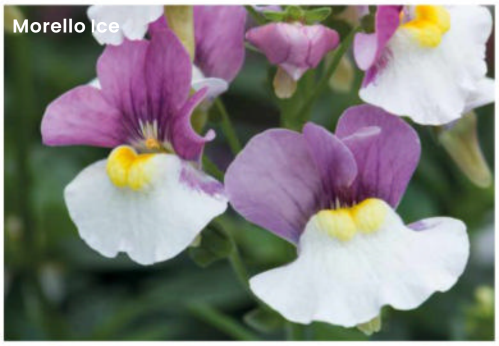

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Blooming from late March to October, these exquisite flowers will brighten baskets, borders, and window boxes with their rich, harmonious shades. Nemesia 'Melody' is a cottage garden favourite, offering longer-lasting blooms and a delightful vanilla scent that attracts pollinators.

This beautiful collection includes Pink, Raspberry, Lilac Blue, Swansong, and Morello Ice, each producing an abundance of miniature snapdragon-like flowers. Despite their delicate appearance, these winter-hardy perennials withstand temperatures as low as -15°C, ensuring year-round greenery.

Plant them in well-drained soil, avoiding heavy clay, in full sun or partial shade with a south or west-facing aspect. Growing to 40cm tall and wide, they're a resilient, romantic addition to any outdoor space.

Naomi

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Root of the matter!

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'What's it like growing a gardening presence on social media?'

Jamie Walton is an ecological gardener, online content creator and author of the book *Nettles and Petals: Grow Food. Eat Weeds. Save Seeds* (Leaping Hare Press, April 2025) @nettlesandpetals

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As a gardener in the public realm, It's often assumed that gardening was always part of my life. Yet, I grew up without a garden at home and horticulture wasn't on the school curriculum, so I had no real exposure to gardening throughout my formative years. The idea of planting a seed and watching it grow was entirely foreign to me, as was the prospect of becoming a content creator.

My first real experience of gardening came by accident and not until my early 20s. On a whim, I took on a friend's overgrown back garden, learning through trial and error. But it wasn't until I discovered the complexity of soil that everything clicked. That led me into a career in horticulture, working my way from trainee to head grower while developing a focus on ecology and soil health. Then, one day while working in the garden, I propped up my phone against a raised bed and filmed myself planting nasturtiums. I posted it online to what was my personal account at the time and within a month, I went from being a fairly introverted grower to inviting over 100,000 people online into my garden daily. Two years on, I'm now part of a thriving global gardening community on social media, sharing the simple joy of gardening with millions.

But becoming a gardening personality in the digital age isn't all likes, blooms and book deals. Social media is a space almost as complex as soil itself, and navigating it comes with both challenges and rewards I had not expected.

When I first started creating content, it was never about becoming an 'influencer'. I simply wanted to share the quiet joy I'd found in gardening. The idea that my videos and posts could go on to inspire people to sow their first seed or care for their soil wasn't really a consideration. Yet, over time content creation became a way to create meaningful connections and, hopefully, spark change. The ability to cultivate a global audience, even from a field in North Yorkshire, is one of its truly transformative aspects, and my reach has made it possible to rally support for community projects and champion conservation. But as the followers and views grew, so did the opportunities to draw me away from that quiet joy.

The draw towards chasing views, the fickleness of algorithms, diminishing attention spans and the occasional wave of negativity can also be overwhelming, and I often wonder if my efforts could be better spent? There's a delicate balance between sharing authentic moments and curating content that resonates widely. At times, I've struggled with the commodification of something so personal and continually interacting with and capturing nature through the lens of a camera phone and that isn't without its irony.

While I advocate for slowing down, observing nature and working in harmony with the land, I also navigate and contribute to the fast-paced, often superficial world of digital content, where depth must compete with algorithms, and I personally spend far more time on devices than I would like. Even so, they are after all just social platforms. We can decide how we use them, and I have witnessed how they can amplify messages that truly matter and inspire action. A video about pollinator-friendly flowers reaching a million viewers isn't just a statistic; it's also a potential ripple effect of ecological action.

> *"Becoming a gardening personality in the digital age isn't all likes, blooms and book deals. Social media is a space as complex as soil itself"*

At its core, gardening is about growth, patience and resilience – qualities many of us are seeking in an increasingly unpredictable world, and although nuanced, social media has given us the ability to share experiences, learn from each other, and feel part of a global community with a shared love for gardening. Whether that then inspires us to go outside or simply provides a 'slower moment' as we scroll through the ever-quickening pace of online media, that is surely worthwhile? That's what keeps me posting.

My own journey into content creation was unexpected, but I hope it is a reminder that passion can take root anywhere and flourish in ways you may have not imagined. For those considering sharing their own gardening stories online, my advice is simple: focus on authenticity and your interests. Whether you reach 10 people or 10 million, every seed sown – physically or metaphorically – has the potential to grow into something you may not have expected, and for me, the more gardening content online, the better!

As we continue to navigate the ever-changing digital landscape, I hope the rise of gardening content inspires more people to put down their phones and pick up a trowel. The allures of digital media will only keep growing, so let's ensure our gardens grow with it.

Listen to Jamie talking about his holistic and ecological approach to gardening in the Spring Conversations podcast from April at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

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WHAT TO DO NOW

50 things to do this month from the *Gardeners' World* team

This month!

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113 House plants

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM; NEIL HEPWORTH

Mulch borders

Add mulch around emerging perennials in your borders after you've finished weeding. The weeding will have loosened the surface of the soil a little while the mulch will conserve ground moisture, making later weeding easier. Mulch also improves the soil structure over time when creatures such as worms and beetles work it into the soil.

Use your garden compost as mulch or buy bagged versions. Shovel it inbetween the plants, then rake it out or use your hands to push it around the plants to a depth of about 5cm. Work from back to front to avoid walking on the newly mulched areas.

Take care not to smother low-growing plants with your mulch

---

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Snip off frost-damaged leaves on evergreen shrubs, such as bay and pittosporum. Look for brown scorch marks on outer leaves. Cut stems back to healthy growth just above a leaf using sharp, clean secateurs. Chop up the prunings and add them to the compost heap.

Marginal plants add interest to a pond and will soften hard edges

Plant pond marginals

Put some marginal aquatic plants in around the pond now that the water has warmed up enough to support some growth. When you see your established plants beginning to grow, you'll know that it's safe to add new plants.

Pot plants into mesh baskets using loam compost top-dressed with stones to stop soil particles floating away. Soak the plants before you lower them in to reduce the disturbance as the air gaps get displaced by water.

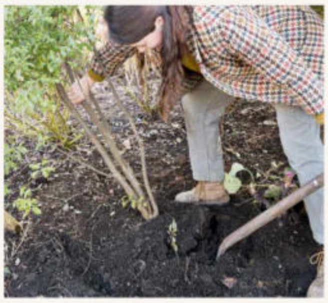
If the margins of the pond are too deep, use bricks to raise the baskets so the rims are level with the water surface.

STEP BY STEP

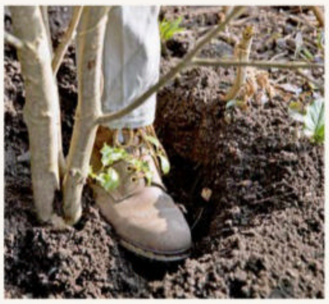
Move evergreens

Transfer evergreen shrubs that have been planted in the wrong position now before it gets too warm for them to survive the move. With care, they will flourish in a better spot.

Transplanted now, the roots will react and grow as soon as they are moved, so as long as you keep them watered this summer, they will root out and establish successfully.



1 DIG a circle around the rootball and press the spade deep under it to lift it out. Tie up lower branches to avoid snapping them as you work.



2 PREPARE the new site with extra organic matter. Dig out a wide hole just deep enough so that the rootball is level with the soil surface. Water it well.

3 SOAK the plant immediately, then keep it well watered through the growing season. This is crucial in dry or windy weather.

Replace old bulbs with new to keep your pots in colour

Swap spent bulbs in pots

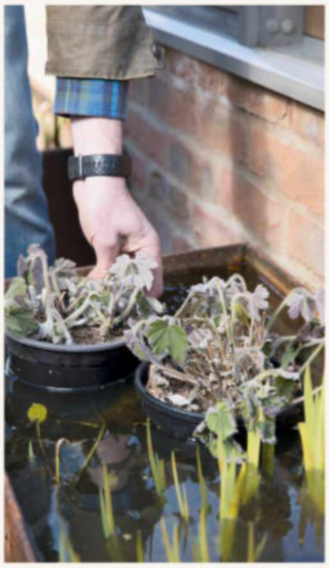
Empty pots of bulbs that have come up blind and plant them out into the garden, a little deeper than they were in their pot. Water them in and follow up with high-potash feeds until the leaves start to turn yellow and die back. This will encourage flower development.

Replace the compost with new peat-free potting compost and find late summer-flowering bulbs to put into your empty pots. Dahlias, eucomis, galtonia and lilies could all be planted now and will provide a range of different colours throughout the season.

Revive dry perennials

Rejuvenate perennials in pots that have been exposed to sudden and severe rises in day temperature when the sun comes out. Sunny spring days are prone to such dramatic changes.

While plants in borders will bask in the warmth, others with a restricted root run can quickly dehydrate. To counter this, add water to a deep tray or bucket and place your potted plants in there to soak. The plants will perk up noticeably after a few hours, but should then be kept in a more sheltered spot or planted out into the garden.



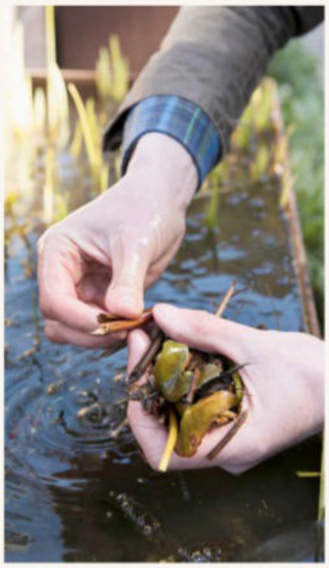
Dried-out potted plants may recover after a good soaking

Clear plant debris from your pond

Pick out as much organic debris – either floating or on the bottom of your pond – as you can to prevent it from using too much oxygen as it decomposes at the expense of other pond life.

Lower the water levels by up to a third if you need to and take care not to disturb other pond life. Go through your plants one at a time, taking off any dead leaves and cutting back vigorous growth.

Carefully top up the pond with water and put all the debris on your compost heap.



Remove plant debris to avoid algae levels building up

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Prune winter jasmine immediately after flowering**
- ☐ **Plant conifers and broad-leaved evergreen hedging when not too wet**
- ☐ **Remove perennial weeds at the base of hedges while they are easy to access**
- ☐ **Add foliage plants to shady areas**
- ☐ **Plant nerines in gritty compost and keep in a warm, sunny spot**

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM.

Slow-release granules will feed plants through the growing season

Add slow-release food to pots

Add granular slow-release fertiliser to compost as you fill containers ready for planting. Released slowly over several weeks, these granules provide a range of nutrients that will support plant growth. The pace of release depends on moisture levels and soil temperature.

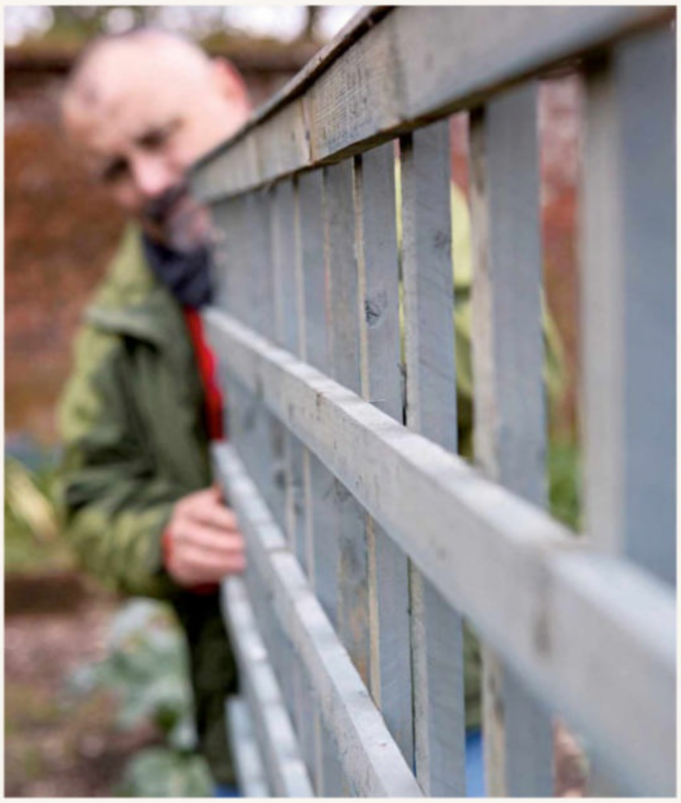
Some formulations last all summer, which means that you don't need to give plants any liquid feed. Check the packet to see how long the granular feed lasts and read the instructions to calculate the right dosage rate. Mix the granules right through the compost for the best results.

Erect trellis to support climbers

Add trellis to screen off areas in the garden and provide support for a wide range of climbing plants. Trellis panels are best secured to walls with rust-resistant brackets and screws.

Use a spirit level when mounting trellis on a wall, and make sure it can take the weight of the plants that will be climbing up and through it.

All hardy climbers can be planted out now at the base of the wall. Position the plants 20cm from the wall base and angle them diagonally towards the trellis. Tie in any loose shoots already covering the support.



Keep checking that the trellis is level during its installation

Beechgrove

Beechgrove Garden

BEECHGROVE ON TV

A new series of Beechgrove Garden will air from early April. You can watch any missed episodes on BBC iPlayer.

BBC iPLAYER

Add perlite to your potting compost to improve drainage

VIEW FROM BEECHGROVE

Take cuttings of pelargoniums

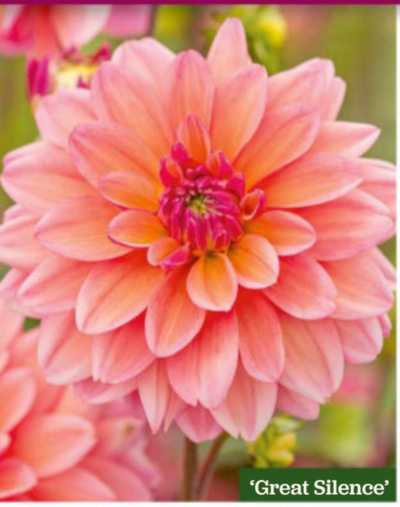
Many pelargoniums root readily from cuttings. At Beechgrove, mature plants are cut back now revealing fresh growth ideal for cuttings. Fill 10cm pots with peat-free multi-purpose compost mixed with perlite, then water the compost. Take cuttings from healthy, non-flowering growth, with at least one pair of leaves below the growing tip. Cut just below a leaf joint, remove the lower leaves and insert the cuttings into the pots, with the lowest pair of leaves just above the surface. With a plastic bag secured over the top, keep the pot on a warm, light windowsill or in a propagator.

DON'T FORGET

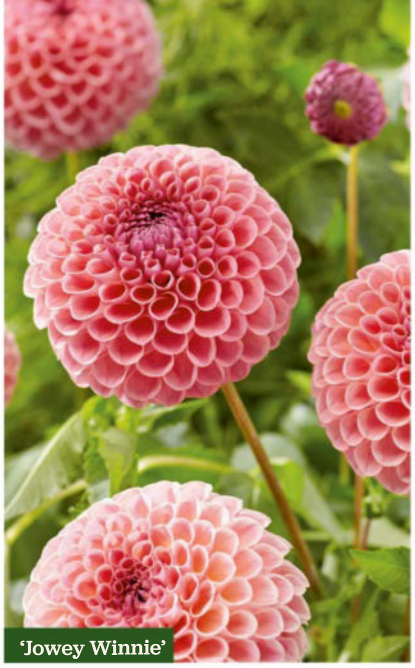
- ☐ **Start direct sowing hardy annuals towards the end of the month**
- ☐ **Prepare brassica netting to keep pigeons, cabbage root fly and cabbage whites at bay before planting young brassicas next month**
- ☐ **Sow pumpkins and sweetcorn under glass or indoors with some bottom heat to maintain a constant temperature**
- ☐ **Prune winter-flowering deciduous viburnum once flowering is over**

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

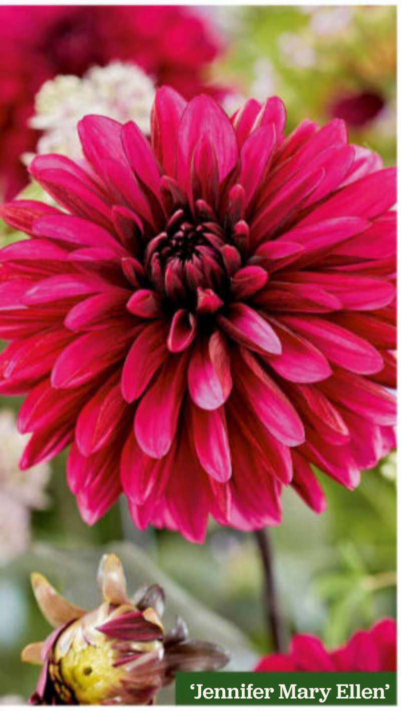
Gardeners' World offer

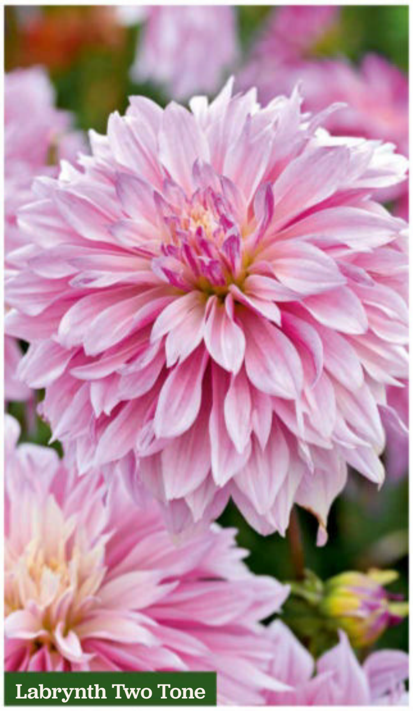

'Great Silence'

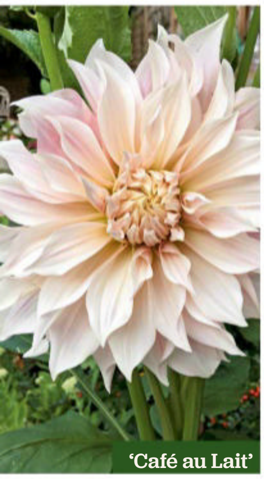
'Seniors Hope'

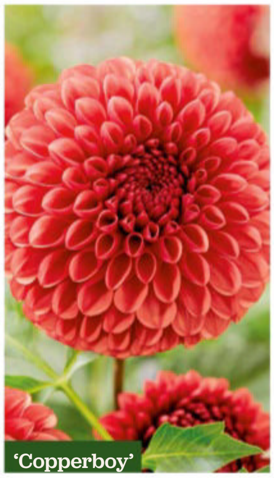

'Jowey Winnie'

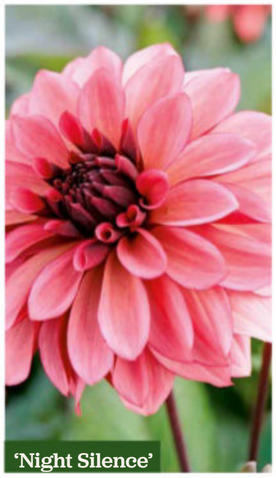
'Bluetiful'


'Jennifer Mary Ellen'


Labrynth Two Tone


'Café au Lait'


'Copperboy'


'Night Silence'

EXTRA 10% SAVING ON DAHLIAS

CHOOSE FROM OVER 260 DAHLIAS

If you've been inspired by our dahlia feature on page 67, then boost your displays for less with this fantastic offer. Whether your garden is traditional or contemporary, you'll find varieties to suit all styles, and ensure that every border and pot is overflowing with vibrant blooms. Choose from Farmer Gracy's entire range of dahlias and enjoy an extra 10% saving on sale prices!

■ ***Dahlia* 'Great Silence'**
Peachy pink tones, strong stems and long-lasting flower power.
Height x Spread 85cm x 40cm
Flowers Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.75~~ **£3.63**

■ ***D.* 'Seniors Hope'**
Stylish blend of dusky, antique purple and rich, velvety red.
H x S 1m x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.75~~ **£3.63**

■ ***D.* 'Jowey Winnie'**
Attractive blend of dusky pink and warm apricot. A ball dahlia.
H x S 1m x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.75~~ **£3.63**

■ ***D.* 'Bluetiful'**
Lilac-purple blooms generously packed with large, wavy petals.
H x S 1m x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.75~~ **£3.63**

■ ***D.* 'Jennifer Mary Ellen'**
Sumptuous, showy flowers with dark, alluring foliage.
H x S 1m x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.75~~ **£3.63**

■ ***D.* Labyrinth Two Tone** Big, showy blooms up to 20cm. Soft lilac pink, violet and white.
H x S 1m x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.75~~ **£3.63**

■ ***D.* 'Café au Lait'**
Our all-time bestseller. Gorgeous creamy-coffee tones.
H x S 1.2m x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.75~~ **£3.63**

■ ***D.* 'Copperboy'**
Stunning ball dahlia on strong stems. Ideal for cutting.
H x S 70cm x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£4.55~~ **£3.48**

■ ***D.* 'Night Silence'**
Vintage appeal, with blooms lasting well into autumn.
H x S 1m x 40cm **F** Jul-Oct
1 bare root ~~£6.90~~ **£5.28**

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Sow your FREE seeds

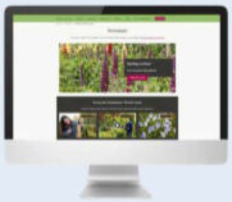
This month, subscribers receive FREE sunflower 'Hallo' and spring onion 'White Lisbon' seeds. This sunflower is a classic hardy annual with large flowers loved by bees and butterflies, and 'White Lisbon' is a reliable spring onion for a steady supply through the growing season. Sunflowers are the perfect flower to grow with children, adding fun and colour to your borders. Spring onions are a tasty summer salad bowl staple and growing your own ensures you've always got a fresh and tasty supply.

Sowalong together

BBC
Gardeners' World magazine
Sowalong

Listen to our Sowalong podcasts, where **Alan Titchmarsh**, **Adam Frost** and the *Gardeners' World* team share tips and tricks for growing all your free seeds, and many more of your favourite flowers, veg and herbs. Find new bite-sized Sowalong episodes every Saturday until the end of June to help you get great results growing from seed. Search for the *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine* podcast on Spotify or Apple Podcasts, or go to ***GardenersWorld.com/podcast***

More expert advice



Get more in-depth advice on sowing all your free seeds, plus top tips on every stage of the growing process, from seedlings through to flowers and harvesting, in the exclusive subscriber-only area of our website. Plus you'll find pruning advice, video inspiration from **Monty Don**, opinion columns, exclusive offers, competitions and much more, all just for subscribers like you. Take a look now at ***GardenersWorld.com/premium***

3 reasons to grow spring onion 'White Lisbon'

- Gives a steady supply of fresh produce over a long period
- A great way to grow tasty homegrown food in a tiny space
- Germination is quick and easy

STEP BY STEP Sowing your spring onions from seed

1 LAY a bamboo cane or stretch out a string line along the soil as a guide for sowing your seeds in a straight line.

2 WATER the soil before sowing, using a watering can with a rose, otherwise the seed can be easily washed away.

3 USE a trowel or the edge of a hoe blade and move it gently along the line to make a 1.5cm-deep sowing drill.

4 SOW the seed thinly along the line by sprinkling it along the drill with your fingers. Cover the seeds with soil, then water.

PHOTOS: ALAMY/BIOSPHOTO; SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

Fothergill's
Gardeners' World
Mr Fothergill's
Onion (salad) 'White Lisbon'
Sunflower 'Hallo'
Easy to grow | Wildlife friendly

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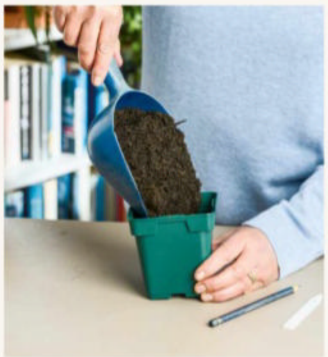
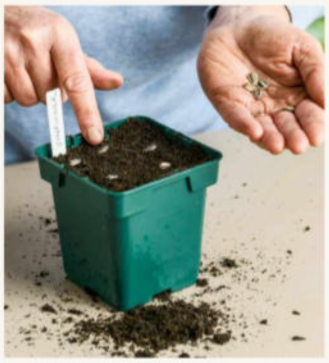
3 reasons to grow sunflower 'Hallo'

- A hardy annual that is easy to sow and quick to germinate
- Large flowers bring bright colour to borders and vases
- Old seedheads are a good source of food for garden birds

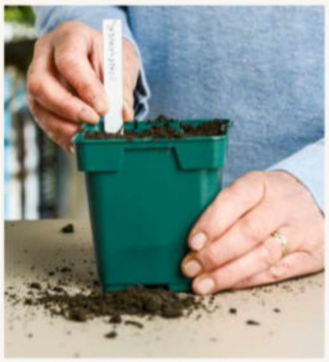
STEP BY STEP Sowing your sunflowers from seed



1 FILL small pots with peat-free multi-purpose compost and firm it down to just below the rim of the pot. Add a label.



2 SOW the seed sparingly on the compost surface, then cover with a 1.5cm layer of seived compost. Water gently.



3 PLACE in a cold frame or windowsill. When the seedlings are 2in tall, transfer them into their own pots or outdoors.

Don't miss next month's FREE* seeds

Gardeners' World
Eschscholzia 'Orange King'
Lettuce Salad Bowl Mix

Not a subscriber?
Turn to page 26

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*DUE TO EXPORT RESTRICTIONS, SEEDS ARE ONLY AVAILABLE TO UK SUBSCRIBERS

*NEW: **Ashley Edwards** shows you what to prune in the garden this month*

Prune rosemary in spring to encourage a good supply of soft young shoots for cooking

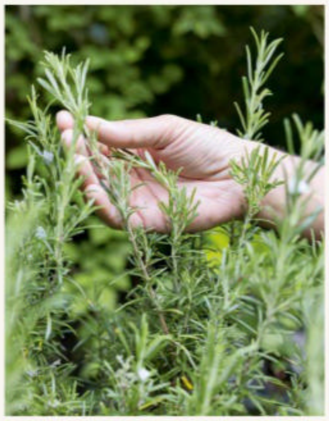
Keep rosemary productive

Rosemary is a staple herb found in many gardens and not only is it versatile for use in cooking, but it also has lilac flowers that are attractive to bees. Left unpruned, rosemary becomes woody with age and produces less of the soft shoots we covet for cooking. Older woody stems are also more likely to suffer from winter wind rock and can snap under the weight of snow.

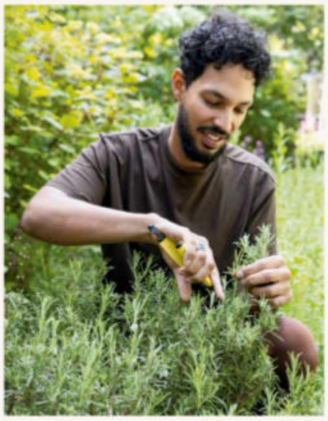
Regular pruning keeps your rosemary tidy and productive for years to come. If your rosemary is already looking past it, you can take cuttings which will become good-sized bushy plants in three to five years. Alternatively, buy a plant at your local garden centre.

STEP BY STEP

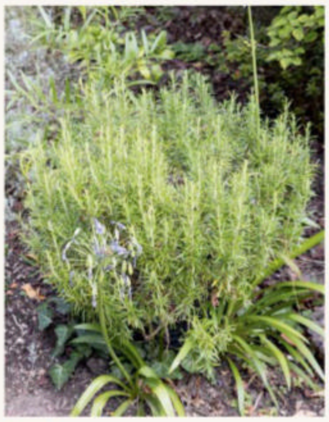
Prune rosemary



1 CHECK carefully before you prune as rosemary will not resprout well from old woody growth. The shoots you select should be pliable, with plenty of green material at the tips.



2 CUT stems back by a third. Give the whole plant an even cut to create an attractive bushy shrub. Step back and change positions as you go, to create an even effect.



3 HARVEST the young, fresh tips that have emerged by the end of summer, when your rosemary bush should be looking nice and bushy. These will be full of fragrance and flavour.

WORDS: ASHLEY EDWARDS. PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; SARAH CUTTLE

Cut back groundcover evergreens this month, pruning stems back by around a third

Prune groundcover evergreens

Prune groundcovering evergreens to keep pathways clear and stop plants from encroaching onto lawns, causing bare patches. Creating a neat and defined edge with your evergreens can also enhance the overall appearance of your garden. It's the little details that can really lift a space.

Start by cutting back any overhanging growth with a clean sharp pair of secateurs. You should prune stems back by a third to a half, depending on the amount of growth you're dealing with. If the plant is really overgrown and needs a major prune, do this over the course of a few years.

When pruning, try to create a natural edge by varying lengths slightly across the plant, as opposed to a straight hard line, which would look out of place unless you have a formal style garden. Cut stems back to a pair of leaves to prevent die back and a twiggy appearance. This will also stimulate bushier growth, creating a healthy and attractive plant.

As you prune back you may find a variety of weed seedlings that have been hiding underneath. These can quickly grow and smother the border edges you've worked so hard on exposing. Remove any weeds then brush down the edges and you'll find that your whole border looks better for it.

Create a defined border edge by trimming evergreens that have spread across pathways

Rejuvenate fuchsias by cutting back to the base

Renovate old hardy fuchsias

Hardy fuchsias are great plants for adding a tropical touch to any garden and flower reliably throughout summer and well into autumn. To renovate an old fuchsia, prune hard early this month. This will give the plant plenty of time to put on new flowering material.

Using loppers or sharp secateurs, cut back all stems to 5-10cm above ground, to one or two healthy buds. Remove any branches that are dead, crossing or rubbing. This may seem severe, but the plant will grow vigorously and flower well this summer.

Use an organic garden compost as a mulch to retain moisture, suppress weeds and feed your plant through the season.

Next month!

☐ Ashley shows how to prune early flowering ceonanthus to keep them well shaped.

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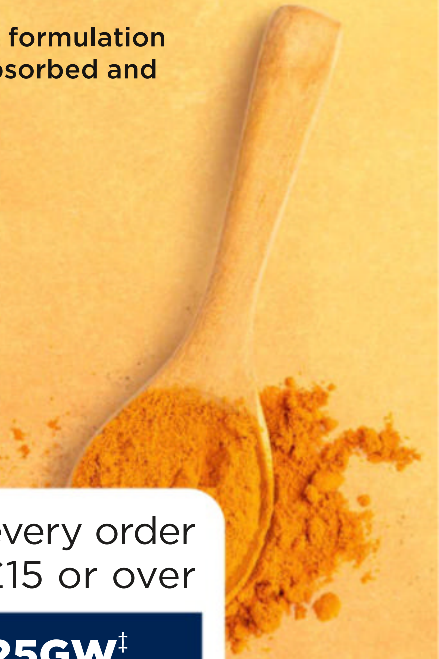

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Cuttings are the easiest way to produce chrysanthemum plants for free

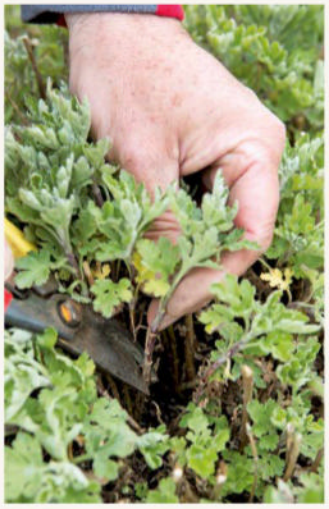
Make more chrysanthemums

Take cuttings of hardy chrysanthemums to flower later this year. They're easy to root at this time of year, and the flowers will give you vibrant late-summer and autumn colour in the borders for years to come. They have an impressively long vase life when cut for the house, too.

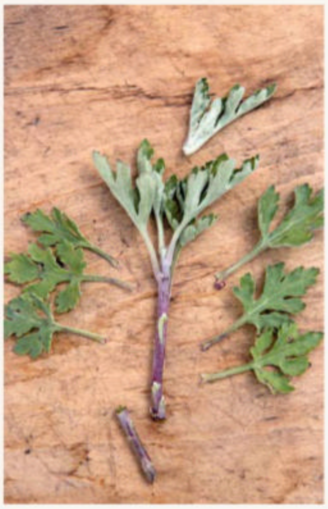
Chrysanthemums are one of the first perennials to send up new shoots in spring and these are perfect for making cuttings. Select healthy shoots, around 10cm long. Keep the cuttings out of direct light and make sure not to overwater, as they develop best when the compost is just moist. The cuttings will root in three to four weeks' time, so be ready to pot on in early summer and plant out a few weeks after that.

Add several cuttings to a pot for plenty of plants or add all of them together for an instant big clump. Plant them out into a sunny border. They will do well in most soils that drain well. Give them some support and keep them well watered while they establish.

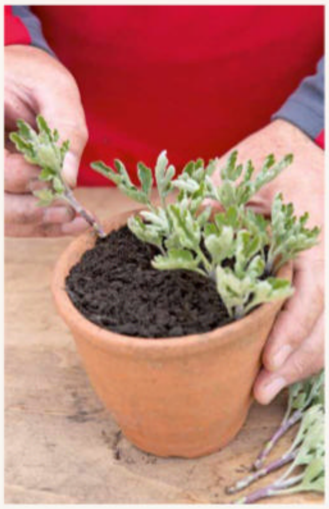
STEP BY STEP Take chrysanthemum cuttings



1 LOOK for strong, upright shoots with the thickest stems. Use secateurs to cut them off at the base, plunging it in just below ground level.



2 TRIM the bottom of the cutting, leaving a bud at the base. Cut the lower leaves to the stem, leaving three sets of leaves at the top. Pinch out the top set.



3 FILL a pot with a peat-free propagation compost. Level the surface, then add the cuttings around the pot's edge. Firm in the cuttings with your fingers.

4 SOAK with a watering can of water at an ambient temperature. Let the pot drain, then place in the greenhouse, in a cold frame or on a windowsill to root.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS . PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS.

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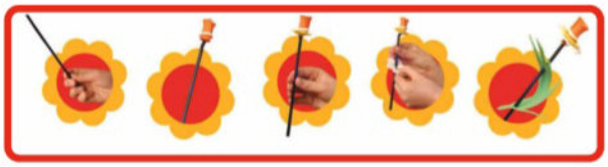

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*NEW: **Kate Bradbury**'s top tasks to do this month to make your garden more wildlife-friendly*

Growing a variety of wildlflowers will attract a wide range of pollinating insects

Create a diverse wildflower area

Use wildflower plugs to create a wildflower area or increase floral diversity in a patch of long grass. Plugs are cheap and easy to grow yourself – fill plug trays with peat-free seed compost and sow the seeds of wildflowers such as red campion, clovers, greater knapweed, ox-eye daisy, wild carrot, field scabious, wild marjoram and betony.

For the best results, buy the seeds separately rather than in a mix, and follow the seed packet instructions as germination needs may differ. If using in grass, transfer plants into 7cm pots to grow on before planting out.

Provide plants for caterpillars

Grow native plants for caterpillars to feed on. Choose purging buckthorn for brimstones; nettles in full sun for red admirals, small tortoiseshells and peacocks; long grass for meadow species like the gatekeeper; and cuckoo flower for the orange-tip.

Plant a native hedge, and let dandelions and docks flourish in a corner. Adult butterflies feed on a variety of nectar-rich plants, but their caterpillars are more fussy.

Native plants provide the food that caterpillars need

Sunflower seeds contain the protein and healthy fats that birds need

Grow seedheads for birds to eat

Fill your garden with natural foods for birds, by sowing the seeds of globe artichokes or cardoons, sunflowers and globe thistle – all beautiful flowers that will develop seedheads that birds love. Sow seeds individually in modules of peat-free seed compost and water gently. Keep on a windowsill or on a bench in the greenhouse.

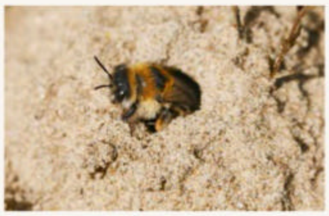
Pot on into 7cm pots when the seedlings are large enough to handle. Harden off before planting out after the frosts have passed.

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Plant angelica and water figwort to provide flowers for wasps. Wasps are useful in the garden as they take caterpillars, aphids and other 'pests' to feed their grubs. Plant in moist but free-draining soil in sun to partial shade.

Make a bee bank

Build a bee bank to attract solitary mining bees, which nest in fine, sandy soil. Using fine bricklayer's sand, make a large mound in a sunny, sheltered spot. Pack it down and create steep sides that heat up well in the sun. You can create an open mound or pack it into a wooden frame – then wait for the bees to come.



Mining bees like sand so they can create tunnels to their nests

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Sow seeds of half-hardy pollinator flowers such as agastache, cosmos, cornflowers, echinacea, lupin and nasturtium**
- ☐ **Make habitat bundles using spring prunings. Simply bind them together using twine and place them somewhere dry**
- ☐ **Clear litter from your garden and surrounding areas that can harm wildlife such as hedgehogs**

WORDS: KATE BRADBURY PHOTOS: GETTY/ANDYWORKS, BJOERN BARTSCH, SANDRA STANDBRIDGE

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STEP BY STEP Split catmint clumps to make more plants for free

Lift and divide low-growing catmint that is several years old. The loose, sprawling habit of this plant's many varieties means that as the clumps mature they can creep right to the edge of the border.

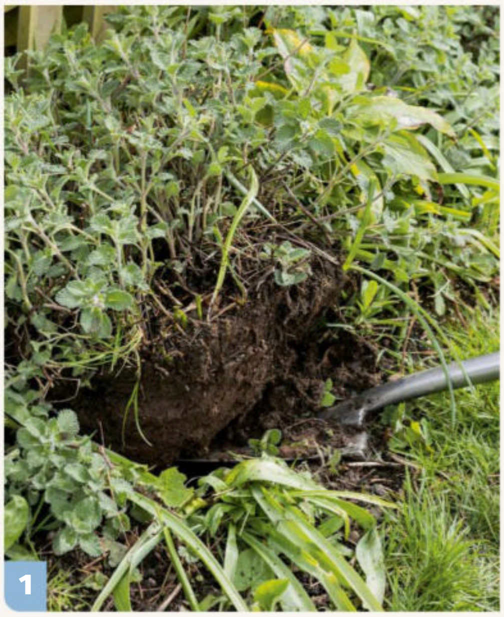
Plant new divisions further back, with plenty of space between the border edge and the plant. Cut them back in midsummer after the first flush of flowers, to keep the stems short and stimulate more flowers.

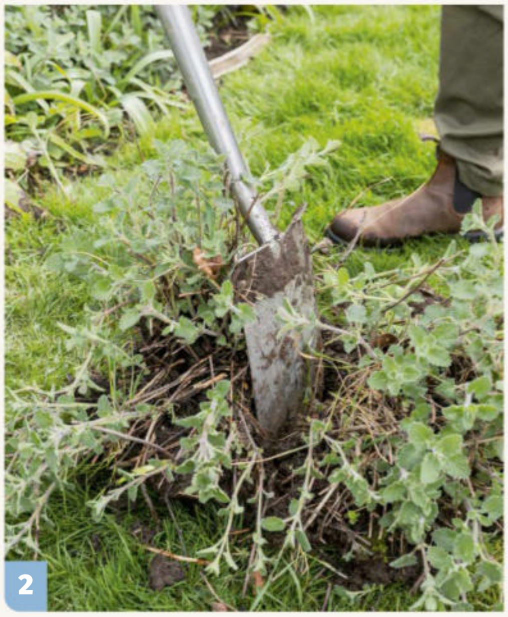
1 LOOK for congested clumps that have grown out so much that the stems are sprawling over the edge of the border. Dig around the plant and lift it out. Work on a sheet if you are lifting it next to a gravel path.

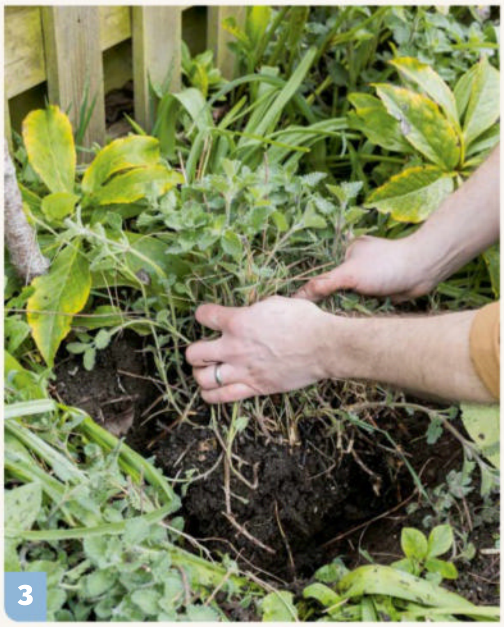
2 EXAMINE the clump to roughly see where the groups of stems are clustered, and place the spade in the gaps to split and separate the clumps with their own roots. Press the spade vertically into the clump to cut several smaller pieces.

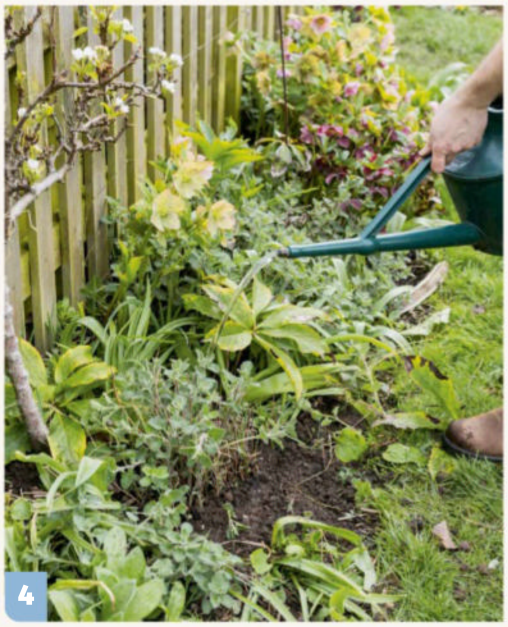
3 SELECT the best divisions (with at least a 15cm rootball) to replant. Prepare the hole deep enough to plant the clump back to the same level it was before. Firm it in well and remove any weeds.

4 SOAK the division thoroughly to settle it back into the soil. Snip off the leggiest stems. They'll be quickly replaced by sturdy new growth and keep the clump upright for longer. Keep the new divisions watered during dry spells until midsummer.









30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Plant dahlia tubers outside in sunny, sheltered spots that have rich, free-draining soil. Dig a hole and mix in a handful of well-rotted garden compost. Sit the tubers on the soil and cover with a 15cm layer of soil.

Bellis provide instant impact to tired displays

Add bellis to boost containers

Brighten up your pots with ornamental daisies (bellis), flowering now and found in all major garden centres.

Bellis usually have double, dark pink to white flowers. Add them to mixed containers and baskets, around pots with evergreens, or between bulbs for extra colour. They do best in moist soils, so need space. If they are added to a crowded pot, water them more than you would otherwise. It's worth it, because once established they'll flower right through the summer.

QUICK SOLUTIONS

Check new shoots regularly for aphids. If they appear, remove them by hand while the numbers are still small. Encourage natural predators such as hoverflies, ladybirds, house sparrows and blue tits to feast on these tiny insects.

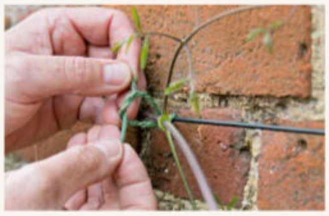
WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH

Use a single colour in your flower beds to allow the plants' shapes and forms to provide the visual effect

Create a colour-themed corner in your plot

Plant some early-flowering perennials among your spring bulbs. Plants that have contrasting colours or bold textured foliage will look particularly effective; for example, the purple foliage and lime-coloured flowers of euphorbias make a striking addition, as does brunnera with its blue flowers and large leaves.

For a white theme, this lamprocapnos, with its pretty bleeding-heart flowers, mixes well with the white narcissus and will die back with bulbs. Planting now between the bulbs when they're in flower avoids damage and means the lamprocapnos will emerge with the bulbs next spring. Keep the new plantings well watered.



Loosely tie in clematis to avoid damaging its delicate stems

Tie in clematis

Train the new growth of clematis by tying them onto their supports. They are naturally self supporting over hedges and trees, but can grow away from the space you want them to be in, so tie them in loosely with soft string.

Clematis stems can be brittle, so be gentle with the ties to avoid snapping the stems.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

Aim the spout at the plant so the roots get all the water

Plant out sweet peas

Grow annual sweet peas in your garden for sweetly perfumed blooms and perennial varieties that will come back year after year. Sweet peas need plenty of feed and moisture, so add rich compost or well-rotted manure to the soil to give them the best start.

Water the plants in their pots just before you plant them out and get the supports ready to go into the ground at the same time. Plant them 20cm apart and firm them in so they are at the same level as they were in their pots. Pinch out the tops of leggy plants, give them all a good soak and protect them from slugs.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Look out for self-sown seedlings and move them to where you want them to flower
- ☐ Plant summer-flowering bulbs in sunny spots
- ☐ Thin out bushy perennials by removing a third of the new shoots to create a sturdier plant
- ☐ Bring in pots of lily-of-the-valley flowers to enjoy the scent indoors
- ☐ Remove weeds by hand around autumn-sown hardy annual seedlings

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Grow on tender veg such as aubergines in a warm, sunny spot in the greenhouse

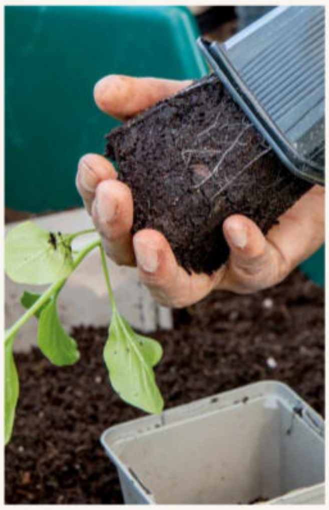
Move tender veg to bigger pots

Tender vegetables that need a long growing season in order to fruit well, such as aubergines, peppers and chillies, are best transplanted to bigger pots promptly to give their roots more room so the plants can develop as quickly as possible.

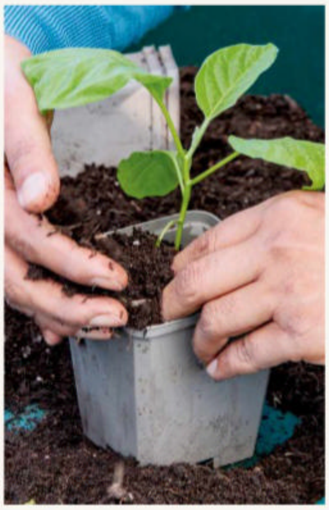
Move them into a new pot no more than half as wide and deep as the previous pot, and keep them in warm, well-lit conditions for the rest of the month. Use peat-free multi-purpose compost at this stage, as the plants won't stay in the pots for too long and won't exhaust all the nutrients.

The plants should be ready to pot on next month, using an equal mix of peat-free multi-purpose and soil-based John Innes compost in 30cm-wide pots. Add a half-strength general liquid plant food to your watering can each time you water to help the plants develop. Switch to a weekly high-potassium liquid plant food once the first flowers appear.

STEP BY STEP Potting on young tender veg plants



1 GENTLY turn the plants upside down and tap the bottom of the pot. If the rootball has enough roots to hold the compost in a block, pot into a bigger pot.



2 ADD a little compost to the bottom of the new pot. Place the plant on top and carefully push in more compost down the sides, firming it in as you go.

3 INSERT a label, because it's very easy at this time of year to get your young plants muddled up, especially if growing more than one variety of the same crop.

4 PLACE all the pots of the same crop in their own tray, to make hardening off easier later on if they are to stay outdoors in summer. Water them in gently.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANSPHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS

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Fragrant compact wisteria

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Wisteria 'Amethyst Falls' is a compact variety of the much-loved favourite that's perfect for planting in a large container on a sunny patio.

Highly fragranced panicles of lilac, pea-like blooms cascade down from its stems from May to July. Unlike most varieties of wisteria, 'Amethyst Falls' will reliably flower within a few years, so you will be able to experience its beauty and perfume quickly. **Height x Spread** 5m x 3m **Flowers** May-Jul

- 1 plant in 10.5cm pot **£15** *(K24719)*
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It's no wonder phlox has been a firm favourite in gardens for many years. Masses of blooms form gigantic flowerheads in summer, producing a sumptuously sweet perfume, and it also attracts bees and butterflies. Plus it's low maintenance and easy to grow. **H x S** 80cm x 60cm **F** Jun-Sep

- 6 bare roots **£14** *(K39043)*
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Phlox

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Harden off plants in cold frames

When they are ready, move tender annuals into cold frames to harden them off in readiness for planting in the garden next month.

This process acclimatises plants raised under cover to conditions outside. If you don't have a cold frame, find a sheltered spot out of the wind and direct sunlight, then use fleece to cover them at night.

If the temperature drops dramatically, bring them back in for the night. In a frame you can close the lid at night for a few days, then begin to leave it completely open before planting.

Keep an eye on the weather forecast and delay if a cold snap's coming

Avoid using out of date seeds or germination may be patchy

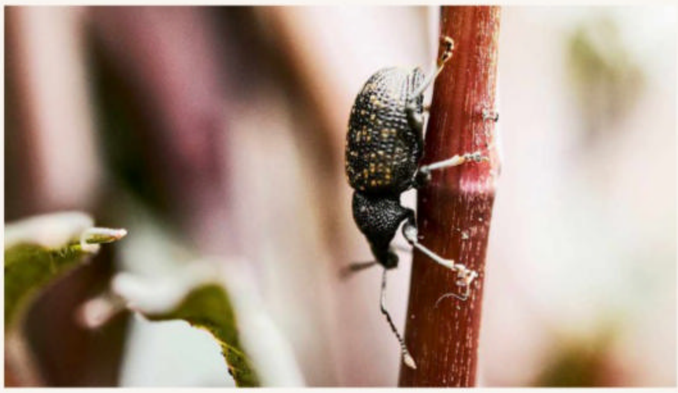
Check and sort viable seeds

Go through seed packets to make sure they are viable to sow this spring. There should be two dates on the pack; one tells you when it was packed and the other is the expiry date. Replace any that have expired. As a general rule, the harder the seed coat, the longer they remain viable. Replace thin seeds such as parsnips every year, but beans will last several seasons.

If you are unsure, place a few seeds on a wet paper towel and keep them warm to germinate as a way of testing the viability of the seeds in the packet .

20 MINUTES TO SPARE

Save money on winter bedding plants by starting some pansies from seed now. Fill a modular tray with peat-free multi-purpose compost.
Firm it down gently and water using a very fine rose, or soak from below.
Sow the tiny seeds onto the surface of each cell.
Cover with a layer of sieved compost and keep in a propagator at 18°C.



Vine weevil causes damage both in larval and adult form

Look out for vine weevil larvae

Vine weevil larvae overwinter in pots where the eggs were laid, so will have feasted on soft roots. You may notice uncharacteristic wilting on some plants.

Discard all the compost of infected plants. The adults are nocturnal and feed on leaves, leaving notches on the margins, then hide among debris and under pots. They are difficult to spot and pick off but you can soak pots with a nematode control to attack the larvae. If you find larvae, use nematodes now, then again in late summer, to minimise plant damage.

French bean seedlings will do best in a reasonably deep pot

Sow French beans in pots

Fill some pots with peat-free multi-purpose compost and sow a few French bean seeds. Firm the compost level before laying the seed on the top.

Cover the seeds with a 2-3cm layer of sieved compost and water well, using a watering can with a fine rose. A heated propagator will speed up germination but the pots will be fine on an unheated bench. Germination will take between a week and 10 days. Give seedlings plenty of light once they appear.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS
PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

Begin potting up plug plants

See if plants grown in modules are ready to plant out or pot on by lifting the tray and checking the roots. If the roots are visible through the drainage holes, it's probably time to pot plants up.

To get plants out of modules without damage, push a dibber or similar through the bottom and the rootball will release.

Resist the urge to tug plants by the leaves. If they feel stuck, water the tray first to make the job easier. Handle plants by the roots to avoid damaging them.

If the plants are ready, the roots should be starting to circle a little and be visible from under the tray

Sow a few extra pots for any planting gaps in midsummer

Start butternut squash plants

Start butternut squash plants, one seed to a 9cm pot. Fill the pot with peat-free multi-purpose compost, firm the surface level and gently press a seed in, blunt end down.

It should be covered by a 2cm layer of compost. Soak with warm water to promote germination, and keep them at 18°C.

Decide how many you will need. One plant will normally produce about five fruits and take up 1.5m^2.

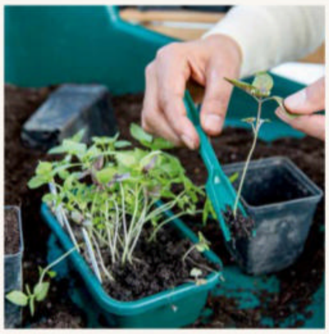
DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Reduce watering of potted cyclamen to prepare them for their summer rest**
- ☐ **Pinch out grapevines, two buds beyond each flower truss, and remove sideshoots**
- ☐ **Sow leafy herbs such as basil, coriander and dill and keep at a temperature of 20°C**
- ☐ **Shade seedlings from strong sunlight on warm, cloudless days**

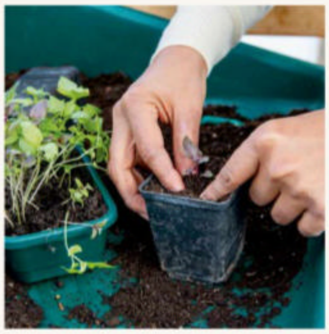
STEP BY STEP Transplant chilli seedlings

Prick out chilli seedlings to encourage plants to grow on. They have a long period of development so act now to encourage a good crop this summer, which can continue into the autumn.

Chillies do best grown at high temperatures so a heat mat will help them through low night temperatures. A warm windowsill is good, too, but turn the seedlings on a daily basis to keep them stocky and straight.



1 HOLD a seedling gently by the tip of a leaf to steady it while levering it out of the pot with a dibber under the roots.



2 FILL a pot with compost, make a hole and lower the plant in. Firm it in with the leaves held just above the surface.

3 WATER the pot gently. Use a can filled and left in the greenhouse a few days ago to avoid a temperature shock.

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS

Gardeners' World offer

Coronilla valentina 'Citrina'

DOUBLE UP FOR 1P

Evergreen winter-flowering shrub

Coronilla valentina 'Citrina' is a compact evergreen shrub with bright green leaves and an abundance of lemon-yellow, pea-like blooms.

Flowering from December through to mid spring, and sometimes again in the summertime, coronilla's sweetly scented blooms will brighten borders and pots on dull winter days. For the best displays, plant it in a sunny, sheltered spot, near a south-facing fence or wall.

Height x Spread 90cm x 90cm
Flowers Dec-Apr

- 1 plant in 9cm pot ~~£14.99~~ **£9.99** **SAVE £5** *(74420)*
- 2 plants in 9cm pots ~~£29.98~~ **£10** **DOUBLE UP FOR 1P** **SAVE £19.98** *(KB6227)*

MORE SAVER COLLECTIONS

***Daphne × transatlantica* Eternal Fragrance**

With a compact habit, this elegant shrub is perfect for containers near an entrance, where you can appreciate its sweet fragrance.
H x S 90cm x 90cm **F** Apr-Oct

- 1 plant in 9cm pot ~~£17.99~~ **£12.99** **SAVE £5** *(40503)*
- 2 plants in 9cm pots ~~£35.98~~ **£19.99** **SAVE £15.99** *(KB6204)*

***Clematis* 'Taiga'**

A late-flowering clematis with double purple flowers that have creamy green tips. Its compact habit makes it ideal for covering boundaries.
H x S 2m x 1m **F** Jul-Sep

- 1 plant in 9cm pot ~~£14.99~~ **£11.99** **SAVE £3** *(KA8208)*
- 2 plants in 9cm pots ~~£29.98~~ **£19.99** **SAVE £8.99** *(KA9815)*

Sunflower SunBelievable Brown Eyed Girl

A half-hardy annual sunflower for beds and containers that can produce 1,000 flowers over a season. It's easy to grow and flowers for months.
H x S 60cm x 60cm **F** Jun-Oct

- 1 plant in 9cm pot **£12.99** *(KA1036)*
- 2 plants in 9cm pots ~~£25.98~~ **£19.99** **SAVE £5.99** *(KA1037)*

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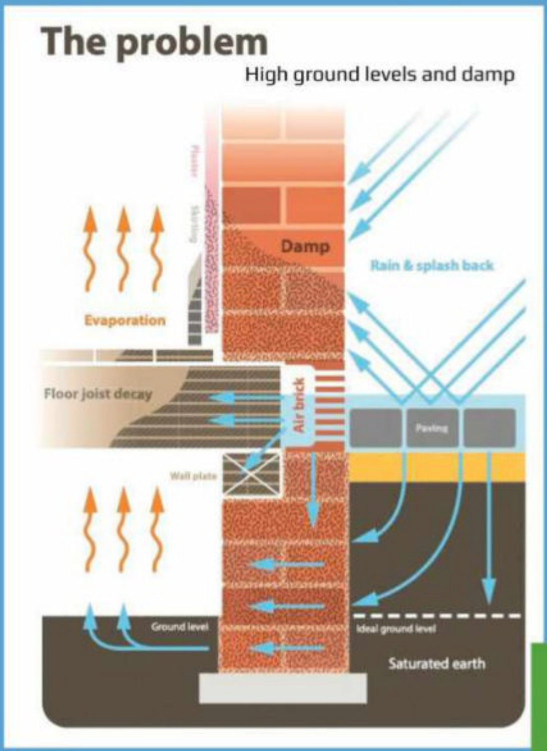
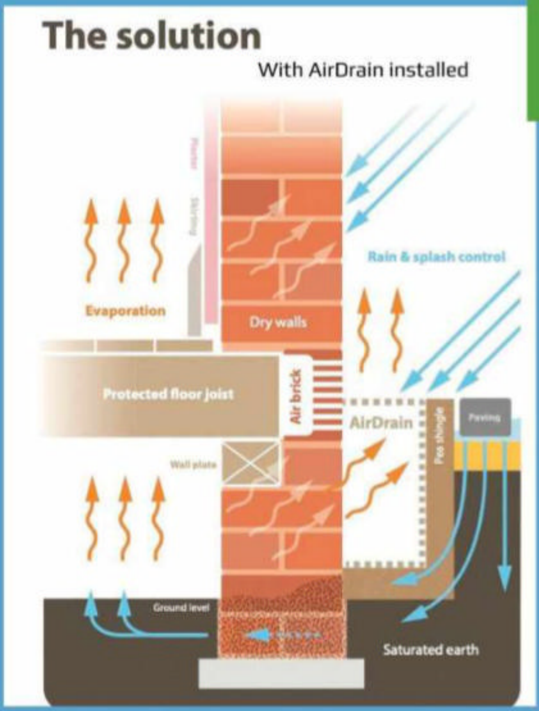

The problem

High ground levels and damp

Plaster
Skirting
Damp
Rain & splash back
Evaporation
Floor joist decay
Air brick
Paving
Wall plate
Ground level
Ideal ground level
Saturated earth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Courgettes can be green or yellow, striped, and in long or round shapes

Sow courgettes

Courgettes are a very easy crop to sow from seed and just a few seeds can provide enough plants to keep you well supplied with courgettes throughout summer.

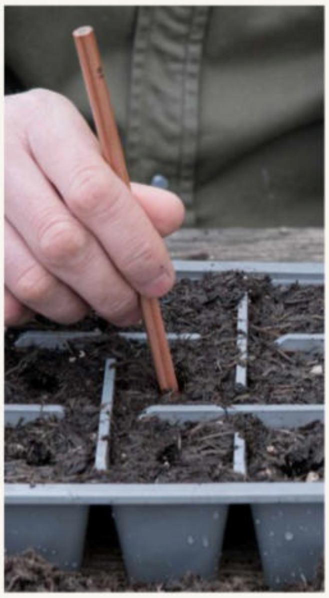
Sow more seeds, though, and you can have spare young plants that will make great gifts for friends and neighbours. It is also useful to have extra plants waiting in the wings in case young plants are damaged by slugs and snails, which was a big problem last year because of the very wet spring and early summer.

To reduce the risk of young plants being damaged, grow them on in pots until the plants are mature, if possible, then plant out in the garden when the first flowers start to appear. If you have plenty of seeds, keep a few in reserve for sowing later as an insurance policy.

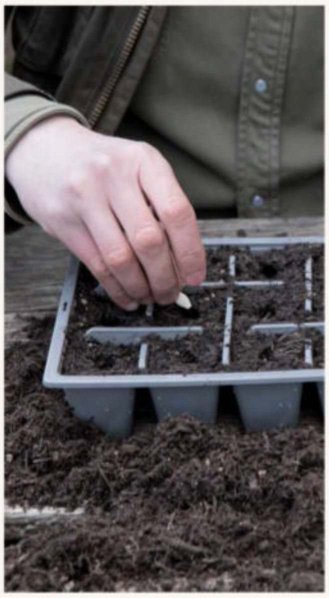
Courgettes sown in April will give an early summer crop, while those sown in May will start cropping a little later.

STEP BY STEP Sowing courgettes

1 FILL large-cell module trays with warm, good quality, peat-free multi-purpose compost. The young plants can stay in these modules until they are well rooted.



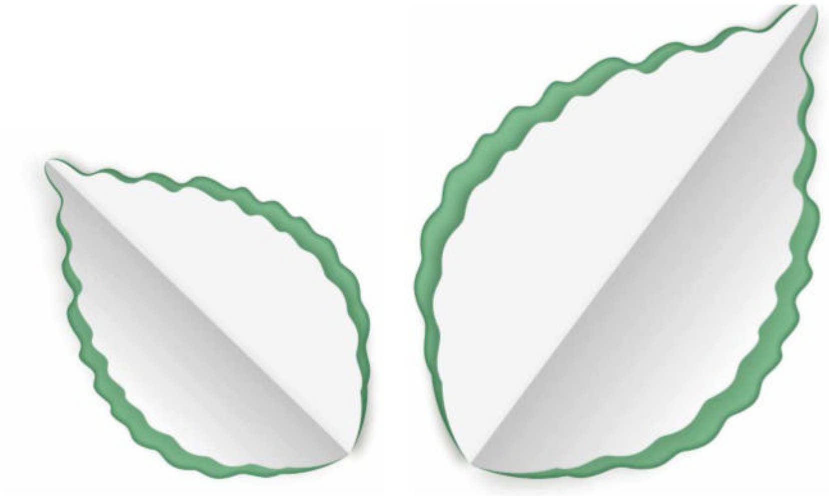
2 MAKE shallow holes in the compost of each module with a dibber or pencil, ready for sowing one courgette seed approx. 1.3cm deep into the centre.



3 DROP the seeds into each hole on their side to reduce the risk of the seeds becoming too wet and then rotting, then cover them with more compost.

4 WATER gently using a watering can with a rose, ideally using water of an ambient temperature, then place the trays on a sunny windowsill.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM



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European Forests: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK

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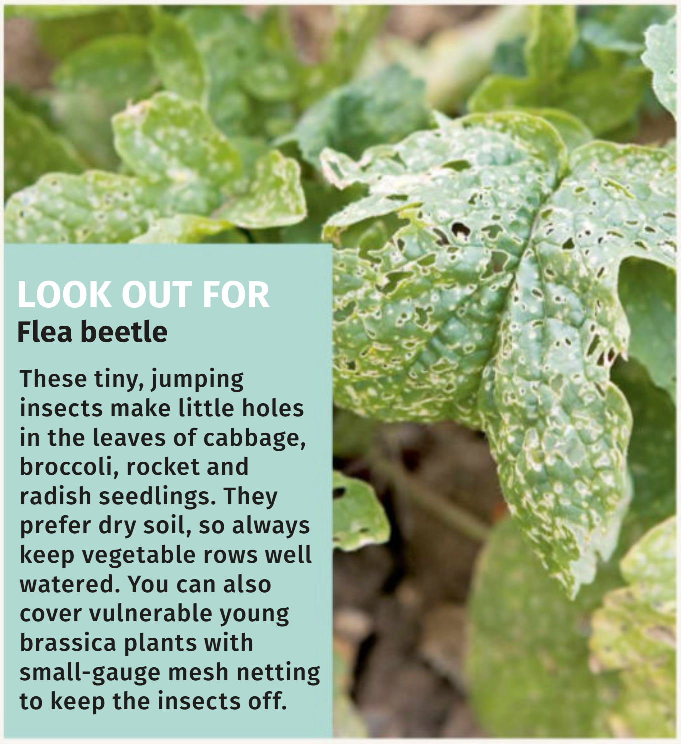
Put up bean supports

Choose a sunny, sheltered site on the veg patch to put up your supports. You'll need poles around 2m tall, depending on your reach. Bear in mind 30cm of the cane will need to be pushed into the ground to keep it steady. Cut poles to the right height or buy canes. Prepare the ground with organic matter, then create teepee shapes or ranked lines. Bean crops are heavy so the support needs to be braced with ties and cross struts to stop it tipping over in windy weather.

Get climbing bean supports ready before planting out seedlings

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Harvest fresh shoots of rosemary
- ☐ Feed blackberries, blackcurrants and hybrid fruits with a high nitrogen fertiliser
- ☐ Harvest thick, sturdy stems of rhubarb, pulling them off at the base
- ☐ Protect plum blossom from frosts
- ☐ Check fruit cages and netting for any holes and repair them with thread or add extra netting to cover gaps
- ☐ Sow parsnips direct in well-drained, sunny spots



LOOK OUT FOR

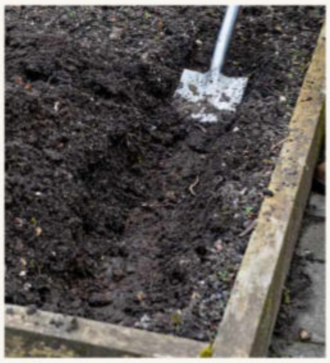
Flea beetle

These tiny, jumping insects make little holes in the leaves of cabbage, broccoli, rocket and radish seedlings. They prefer dry soil, so always keep vegetable rows well watered. You can also cover vulnerable young brassica plants with small-gauge mesh netting to keep the insects off.

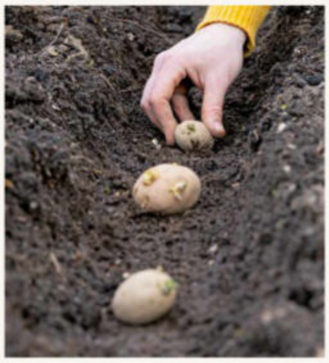
STEP BY STEP

Plant maincrop potatoes

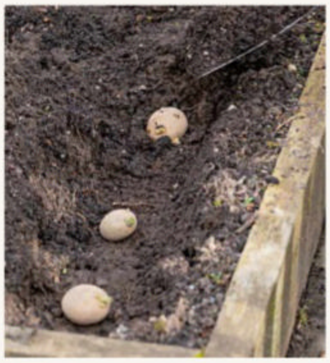
Potato shoots appear within days of planting when the soil is warm. Cover with earth in case of late frosts which will scorch the foliage and set the crop back. Earth up regularly for bumper crops.



1 MAKE a 15cm deep trench by digging out along the length of the bed. Work some garden compost into the bottom and add a dose of general fertiliser.



2 SPACE tubers along the trench about 40cm apart. If the base and top of the tuber aren't obvious, put them on their side. Shoots will find their way up.



3 COVER the tubers with at least 7cm of soil. Rake it along the trench and tamp it down. Leave 75cm between rows to allow soil for earthing up.

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH; SARAH CUTTLE

Save money on shop-bought herbs by growing your own

Grow herbs in containers

If your soil is too heavy to grow herbs that love free-drainage such as rosemary, thyme, sage and oregano, grow them in pots. Herbs will soon establish in containers of multi-purpose compost with a good handful of grit mixed in.

Place in a sunny spot and water well in the first year. Growing herbs in pots also allows you to move them close to your door, for easy pickings to flavour home cooking.

Encourage a good crop by mulching around gooseberries

Mulch around gooseberries

Weed around gooseberry bushes before spreading some spring mulch. It's a good time to add nutrient-rich rotted manure or scatter some fertiliser before adding less nutritious garden compost. Either method will keep the plants producing plenty of fruit.

Mulching after a rainy period is particularly good for fruit as it conserves soil moisture around the roots for longer. Spread a thick layer on the ground but keep it away from the woody stems, as the moisture can cause rot.

To get a head start on veg sowings this spring, cover beds with polythene or fleece to warm the soil

Cover soil to help warm it up

Cover a patch of soil to warm it up a bit and keep the ground clean and friable ready for direct sowing. Soil that contains less moisture warms faster than wet soil. Weed through the area first using a fork, and break up any big lumps. This will aerate the surface and help to retain some warmth when the sun comes out. Glass cloches are the most effective at heat retention but a sheet of clear polythene or fleece will still make a difference for any early sowings.

Plant out broad bean seedlings when they outgrow their pots

Plant out broad beans

Plant out broad bean seedlings that have been raised in pots. Water seedlings then plant them 15cm apart. Pot-grown beans are often leggy so plant them deeply and pinch the tops out to encourage a burst of strong growth. Firm them in well and water again. Put up string lines (canes with string tied between them) to support the plants once the heavy pods appear.

These late planted seedlings will develop quickly and crop just before French beans and runners are in full production.

Next month!

- ☐ Sow sweetcorn, beans and root veg
- ☐ Feed bulbs for good flowers next spring
- ☐ Finish hardening off young plants
- ☐ Plant potted perennials to fill borders

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM; NEIL HEPWORTH; PAUL DEBOIS

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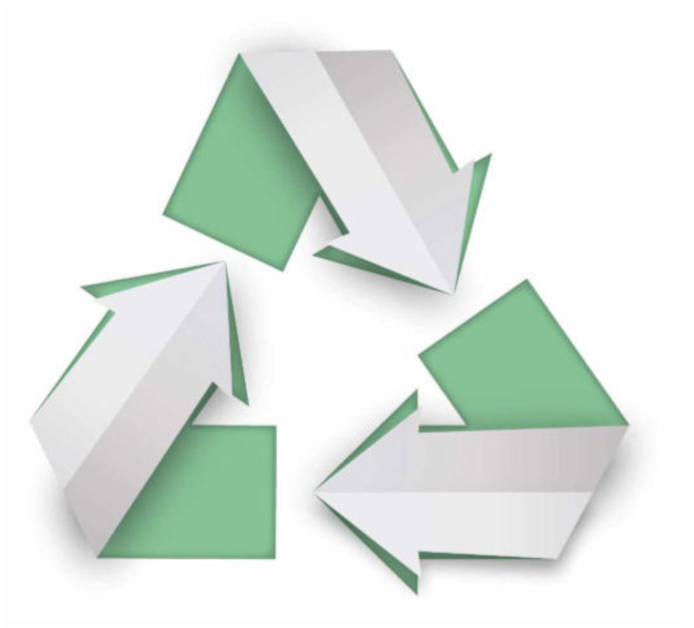

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Europe: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK.

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STEP BY STEP Divide peace lilies

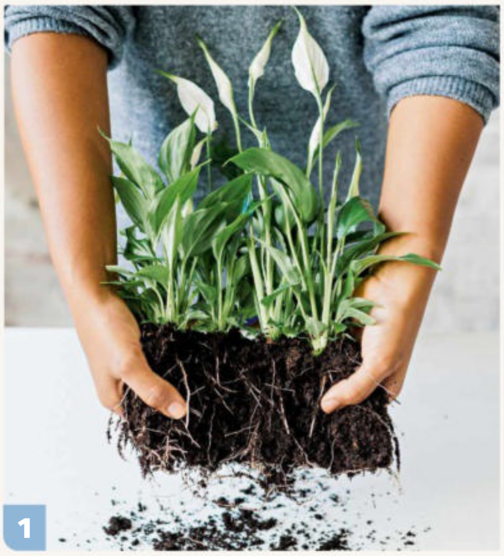
Divide clump-forming house plants such as peace lilies into several new plants when the pot is filled to the edge of the rim. Now is the perfect time to divide house plants because they're in growth and will immediately root out into the new compost. The addition of new compost to root out into will keep them healthy.

1 PREPARE to split the plant apart by holding the rootball firmly in both hands and pressing your thumbs down into the surface of the compost.

2 PRISE the rootball apart, into several pieces. A fist-sized division will be big enough to have instant impact in a new pot. Always separate the plants at the roots rather than pulling at the foliage.

3 SELECT a pot around 6cm wider than the rootball. Pot the plant into a peat-free potting compost mixed with 30 per cent John Innes. Place the plant, then add compost. Settle the plant into the compost by tapping the pot on the table.

4 WATER with rainwater at room temperature, then place the pot in a decorative container. Stand the plant out of direct sunlight and somewhere warm but away from radiators, which will dry it out. Peace lilies do well in a bathroom.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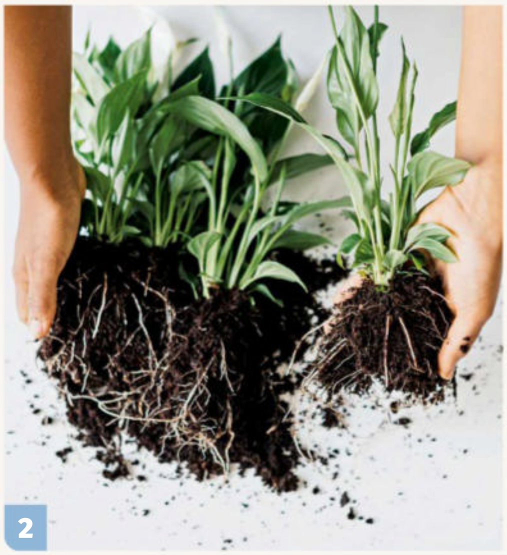
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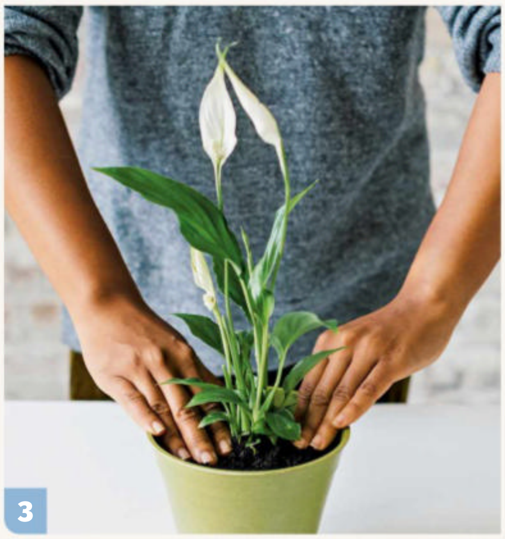
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Add pebbles to succulents

Add a mulch layer of decorative stones around plants that need to be kept dry around the crown. Cacti and succulents will do particularly well with a stone mulch because it replicates their dry natural habitat nicely. In full sun, the stones absorb the heat, which keeps the roots cool and provides the plants with warmth on cooler nights.

Collect stones from the garden or buy bagged gravel in different sizes. Wash any soil or organic debris off them before arranging a layer over the compost surface. The layer will also stop compost drying out from above, so check moisture levels before watering over the stones.

Pebbles keep plants' crowns dry and look better than bare compost

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Check your plants for aphids and scale insect, wiping off any that you find using a damp cloth
- ☐ Water house plants more regularly as temperatures start to rise and hours of sunlight increase
- ☐ Start feeding leafy house plants once a week with a liquid house-plant fertiliser
- ☐ Make sure water for potted plants can reach the compost easily by first clearing the compost surface of any fallen leaves

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

Warhol artwork in the Anima Garden, Morocco

Garden globetrotting: *Morocco*

From the desert landscape of Essaouira to the palmeraies and High Atlas Mountains in and around Marrakesh, Morocco is proof that where there's water, there's a way. **Sonya Patel Ellis** took the tour.

Sonya Patel Ellis
Senior Content Creator

A week visiting the gardens of Essaouira and Marrakesh with a friend was an exciting prospect in itself – swapping the freezing late-November streets of London for warm, sunny climes in less than half a day was a welcome bonus.

Flying into Essaouira gave little clue to the lush, green oases that awaited, the plane window revealing a largely barren landscape of baked red earth with the faint swell of the city on the coast. Just 20 minutes' drive out into the desert however, and we were suddenly travelling down an avenue of multi-hued bougainvillea and palm trees, to arrive at our first destination: the botanical paradise of Jardin des Douars.

A tour of the hotel's stepped garden following a network of bejmat (handcrafted clay) tiled paths led to an impressive array of plants: sky-blue plumbago, crimson hibiscus, gigantic African milk trees (*Euphorbia trigona*), red hot pokers and swathes of red-tinted fountain grass (Pennisetum). We spotted a dried-up riverbed in the distance – had water for the plants been diverted from there? In fact, it comes from a well-situated underground water source first harnessed when the grounds were laid out.

Ingenious ways to divert or capture water, coupled with drought-tolerant planting schemes and the ever-present echo of earth in the form of tiles, pots and adobe walls, is a recurrent theme in the riads and roof-top gardens of Essaouira and, indeed, Morocco. We sought shade in the banana-leaved courtyard of L'Heure Bleue Palais hotel and walked down sherbet-coloured streets to reach a huge buttress-rooted Ficus tree, a symbol of the city's rooted, open-armed

PHOTOS: 14-ANIMA-ALBINA-BAUER; GETTY/LAURIE NOBLE

The city walls in Marrakech, surrounding the historic Medina district

stance: all faiths are historically welcome here. It's also worth a trek, or horse or camel ride south to the vast sand dunes, Dar Sultan Palace ruins, and eucalyptus and mimosa forest of Diabat.

The three-hour drive to Marrakesh took us past rows of olive and argan trees, and the goats that climb the branches to chew the fruits and spew out the oil-rich kernels. An argan oil cooperative along the way is the ideal place to buy the famed golden oil.

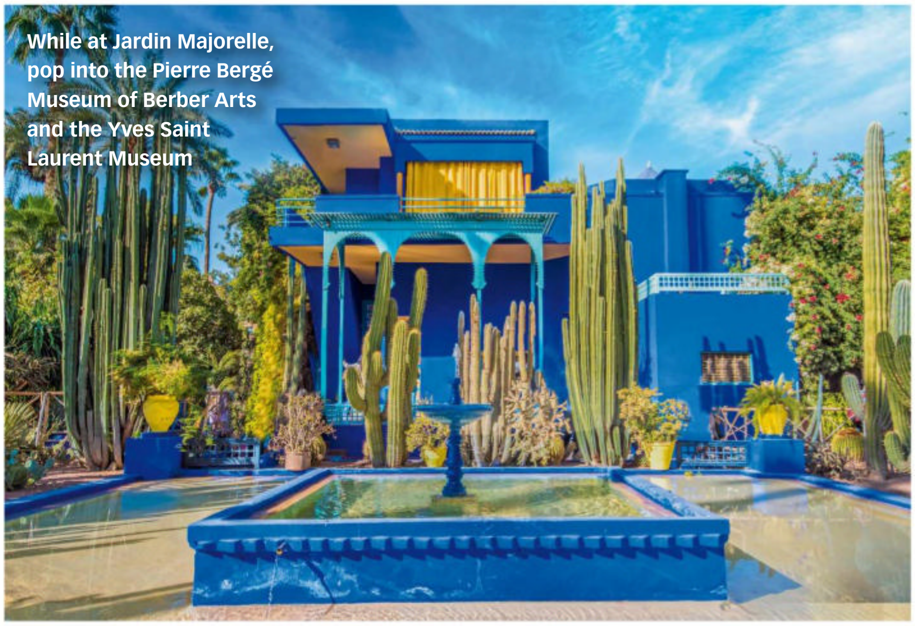
The streets into the city are lined with nurseries of native plants that will go on to furnish gardens near and far, including our next botanical base – the ochre-walled Jnane Tamsna hotel set within the centuries-old Palmeraie. With plant-inspired interiors by Meryanne Loum-Martin and grounds by her American ethnobotanist husband Gary Martin, there's plenty to explore. This includes a raised serpentine walkway lined with agaves, aloes, prickly pears and rose geraniums (try the infused margarita from the bar!) and an olive tree-lined courtyard. This is the perfect place to recharge after a day exploring the many vibrant and culturally significant gardens, or agave and juniper-strewn High Atlas Mountains and Ourika Valley of Marrakech (just an hour's drive away), or to visit the garden.

■ ESSENTIAL INFO

*For warm (not hot) weather and fewer crowds visit Sept-Nov or March-May. We stayed at Jardin des Douars (**jardindesdouars.com**), Essaouira and Jnane Tamsna (**jnanetamsna.com**), Marrakech. We travelled with Inclusive Morocco (**inclusivemorocco.com**), which arranged a bespoke botanical itinerary.*
Gardens: *jardin-bioaromatique-ourika.com; anima-garden.com; jardinmajorelle.com; lejardinsecretmarrakech.com*

Inspired by Morocco

Manage Marrakesh's hustle and bustle by taking refuge in some of its beautiful gardens. For the ultimate get-away-from-it-all break, the flora, fauna, trekking trails and Amazigh (Berber) culture of the High Atlas Mountains are just an hour's drive away.



While at Jardin Majorelle, pop into the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts and the Yves Saint Laurent Museum

PARADISE BY DESIGN

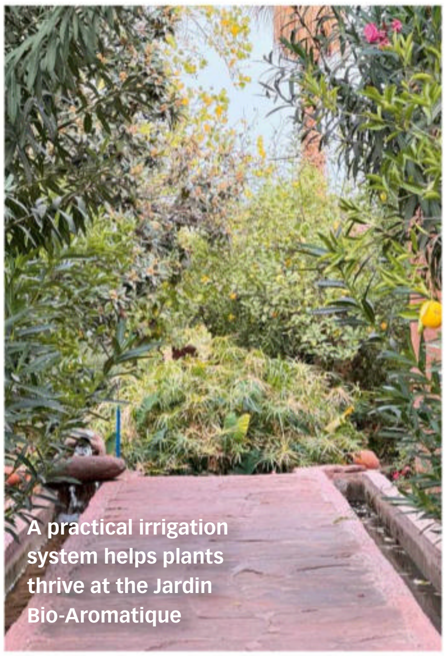
Jardin Majorelle, with its cobalt-blue Moorish-Art Deco aesthetic, is a must for lovers of succulents and cacti. The garden, which was created in 1924, has more than 300 plant species from five continents. Less well known is Le Jardin Secret, a former Saadian dynasty garden and 19th-century palatial riad, redesigned by Tom Stuart Smith in 2016. The four-part, Islamic design helps facilitate irrigation and the creation of a sacred space.

FIND ART IN NATURE

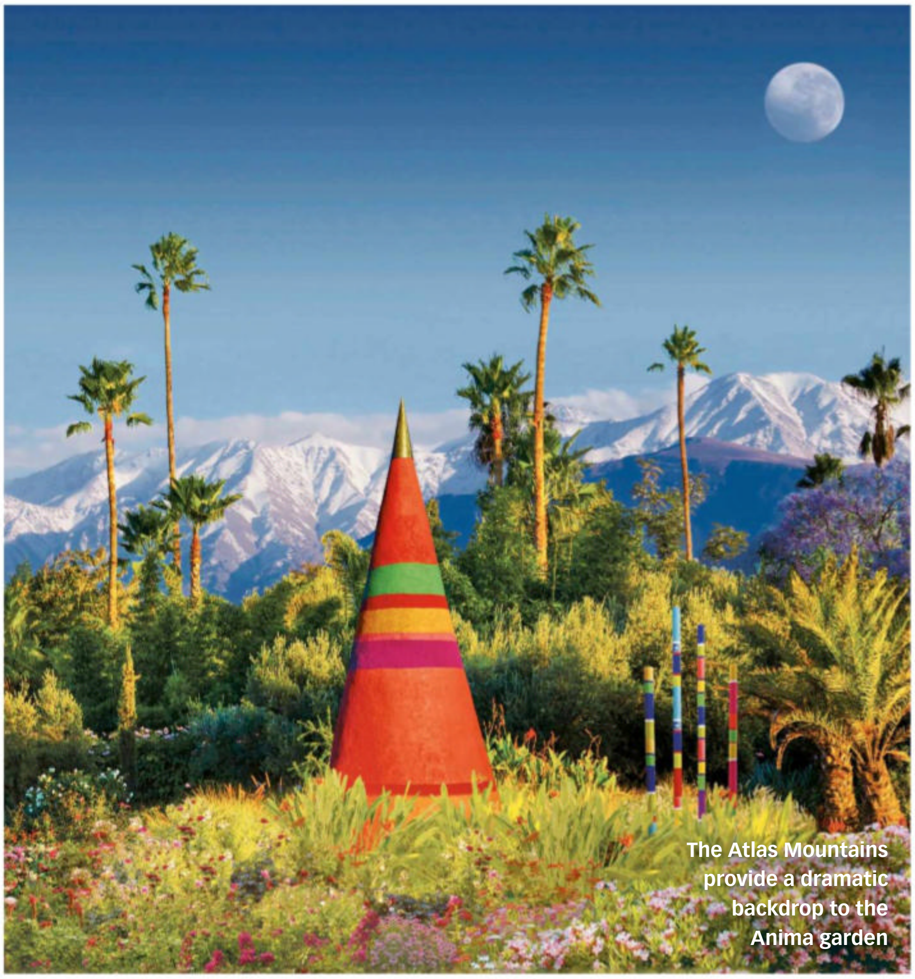
If you like getting your art fix outside and are equally besotted by mountains and plants, the Anima Garden is for you. Created by artist André Heller, it combines snow-capped mountain views, colourful sculptures by the likes of Pablo Picasso, Keith Haring and Andy Warhol, with exotic vegetation, flowers, a large pond and immersive seating areas.

MULTIPLE MOUNTAIN HIGHS

We threw terracotta pots at the Poterie Amassine on the Route de l'Ourika, talked herbs at the Jardin Bio Aromatique – about 30km from Marrakech – and took a two-hour botanical hike to an Amazigh (Berber) homestead, learning about plants and snow-fed irrigation systems along the way from an expert local guide. At the end, we enjoyed a welcome tagine and seven-herb tea.



A practical irrigation system helps plants thrive at the Jardin Bio-Aromatique



The Atlas Mountains provide a dramatic backdrop to the Anima garden

PHOTOS: ANIMA-KEY VISUAL-SCALED; GETTY/BALATE DORIN; SONYA PATEL ELLIS

NEXT MONTH Discover why Nevada is a must-visit location for gardeners

Gardeners' World offer

EXPLORE MOROCCO

After reading our travel feature about Morocco on page 114, you may want to explore this fascinating destination for yourself, so check out the tours below

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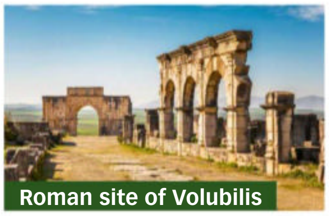
Day timetable

- **DAY 1** Arrive in Marrakesh
- **DAY 2** Marrakesh and Casablanca
- **DAY 3** Rabat and Fez
- **DAY 4** Fez
- **DAY 5** Volubilis, Fez and Meknes
- **DAY 6** Fez to Marrakesh
- **DAY 7** Marrakesh
- **DAY 8** Return home

‡ Other dates available between Sept 2025 and Nov 2026



Roman site of Volubilis

Rabat

Atlas Mountains

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- **Guided tour** of Marrakesh
- **Visits** to Marrakesh's Jardin Majorelle and Saadian Tombs, the port city of Essaouira and the spectacular Atlas Mountains.

Day timetable

- **DAY 1** Arrive in Marrakesh
- **DAY 2** Marrakesh and the Saadian Tombs
- **DAY 3** Marrakesh
- **DAY 4** Essaouira
- **DAY 5** Atlas Mountains and Marrakesh
- **DAY 6** Return Home

† Other dates available between May 2025 and Nov 2026. Departures also available exclusively for solo travellers.

Marrakesh

Essaouira

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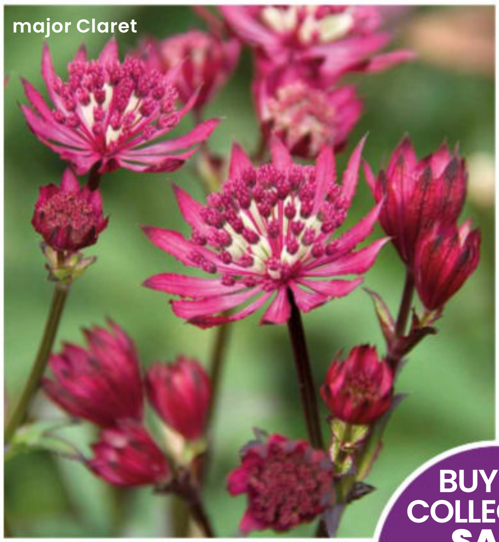
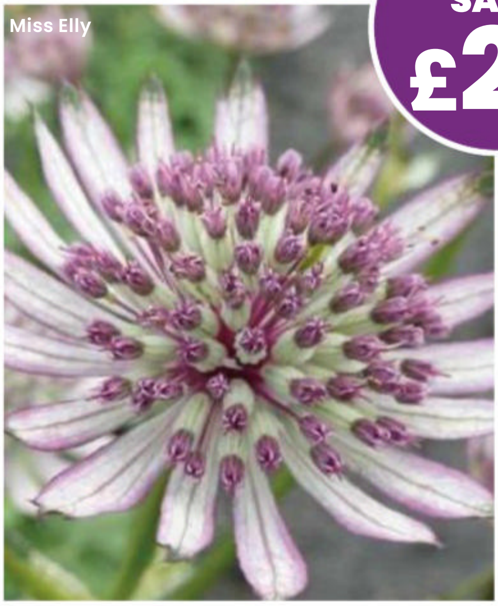
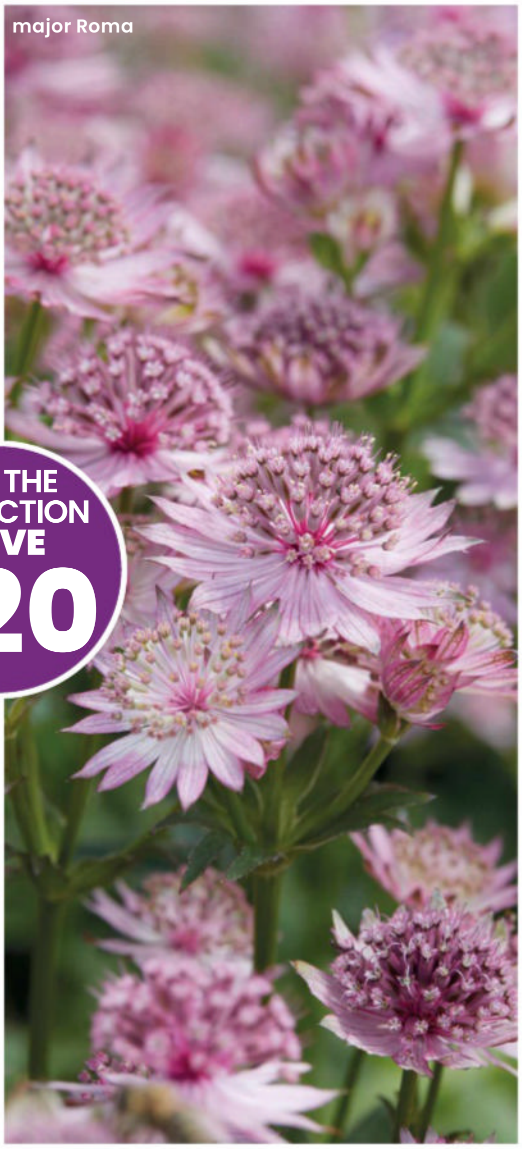

major Claret


Miss Elly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GWHY

ON TEST

Soil rakes

Weight, balance and materials are vital aspects when choosing a soil rake

A well-balanced, comfortable soil rake makes gardening much easier, so be sure to choose the right one for you with our big test, says **Jane Moore**

Spring is peak time for sowing seeds, whether that's filling kitchen garden beds with an array of vegetables, sowing a bed of annual flowers for cutting or grass seed for a new lawn. Whatever the job, a soil rake is invaluable. The only rake that's specifically designed to create just the right soil surface for your seeds, it has a flattened head and fixed tines that bite into the soil and break up clods to create the fine tilth needed for successful germination.

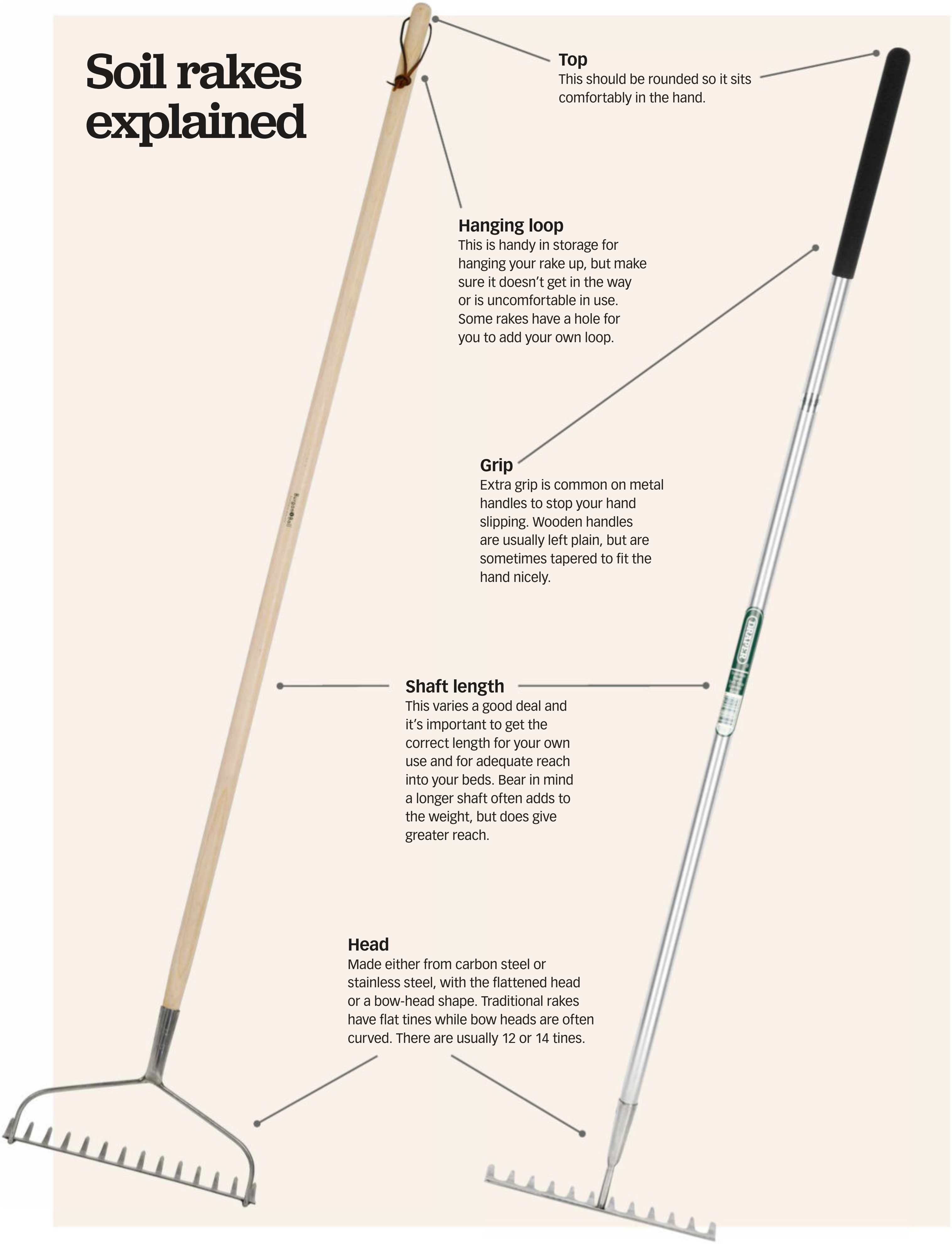
The traditional design features a flat head secured to a wooden shaft by a socket, but variations include tubular steel or aluminium shafts with a grip for your hands, and bow-head rakes, which have a more open construction suitable for spreading gravel and compost, as well as seed sowing.

To find out which soil rakes are the best our panel of four expert testers used them on bare beds in the vegetable garden. They prepared these beds from scratch to create a fine seed-sowing tilth, and used the corner of the rake to draw out a seed drill, covering it and then tamping it down with the flat head of the rake to settle the soil. They used the following criteria to calculate the final scores, with equal weighting given to each:

How our reviewers tested

- **Design** Assessed the elements of design, the materials of construction and the individual appeal of each rake.
- **Comfort** Evaluated whether the rake was comfortable to use, and its overall balance and weight.
- **Performance** Looked at how each rake performed in practice in the garden, using each for some time to recreate the most common seed-sowing tasks.
- **Value for money** Considered the quality of the materials, the length of warranty and the recommended retail price.

Soil rakes explained



Top
This should be rounded so it sits comfortably in the hand.

Hanging loop
This is handy in storage for hanging your rake up, but make sure it doesn't get in the way or is uncomfortable in use. Some rakes have a hole for you to add your own loop.

Grip
Extra grip is common on metal handles to stop your hand slipping. Wooden handles are usually left plain, but are sometimes tapered to fit the hand nicely.

Shaft length
This varies a good deal and it's important to get the correct length for your own use and for adequate reach into your beds. Bear in mind a longer shaft often adds to the weight, but does give greater reach.

Head
Made either from carbon steel or stainless steel, with the flattened head or a bow-head shape. Traditional rakes have flat tines while bow heads are often curved. There are usually 12 or 14 tines.

RAKES IN ORDER OF PRICE

SCORE: 13/20

Draper stainless steel soft grip soil rake

£19.99

Weight 1,215g
Dimensions 153cm x 30cm
Warranty Lifetime

12 tines. Stainless steel head. Tubular steel handle. Sturdy. Short grip is rough on bare hands. Prone to clogging. Handle hard to spot in grass. Lifetime warranty.

Pros & cons

- ✔ Strong construction
- ✔ Slender handle for smaller hands
- ✘ Short and rough grip
- ✘ No hole for hanging loop
- ✘ Grey colour vanishes into the background

Design ★★★☆☆
Comfort ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 18/20

Wilkinson Sword carbon steel garden rake

£24.99

BEST BUY

Weight 1,800g
Dimensions 138.5cm x 30cm
Warranty 10 years

12-tine coated carbon steel head. No frills, basic design. Sturdy construction but lightweight. Weatherproofed wooden handle but may be too short for taller gardeners. Cheapest on test.

Pros & cons

- ✔ Functional, unfussy design
- ✔ Robust and pleasant to use
- ✔ Sturdy handle
- ✔ Good value
- ✘ Tall users found it too small

Design ★★★★☆
Comfort ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

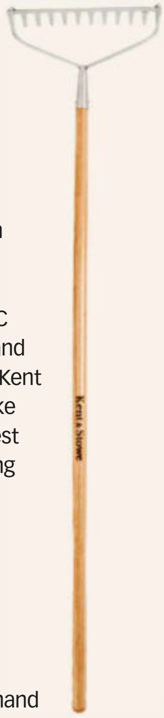
SCORE: 15/20

Kent & Stowe Garden Life stainless steel soil rake

£29.99

Weight 960g
Dimensions 130cm x 31cm
Warranty 15 years

12 stainless steel tines. FSC ash wood handle is short and slender. Much lighter than Kent & Stowe's standard soil rake (see below). Rakes well. Best for small gardens and young or less strong gardeners.



Pros & cons

- ✔ Super-lightweight
- ✔ Well balanced
- ✔ Compact yet sturdy
- ✘ Handle is too short
- ✘ Hole in handle irritates hand

Design ★★★★☆
Comfort ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★★☆
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 19/20

Greenman stainless steel bow rake

£34.95

BEST BUY

Weight 1,340g
Dimensions 170cm x 36cm
Warranty 10 years

14 stainless steel tines. Ash wood handle with tapered waist and rounded end. Double riveted. Heavy but well balanced. Rakes well.

Pros & cons

- ✔ Well made, quality materials
- ✔ Balanced, easy on the back
- ✔ Comfortable handle sits nicely in the hand
- ✔ Creates excellent tilth and drills, tamps soil down well
- ✘ Heavy to use

Design ★★★★☆
Comfort ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

SCORE: 17/20

Wilkinson Sword stainless steel soil rake

£34.99

Weight 1,092g
Dimensions 152cm x 30cm
Warranty 10 years

Classic design. Well made and finished. 12 tines. Stainless-steel head. Weatherproofed ash handle. Well balanced. Performs well with no clogging. Heavy.

Pros & cons

- ✔ Quality construction and materials
- ✔ Comfortable to use
- ✔ Performs well
- ✘ Heavier weight

Design ★★★★☆
Comfort ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 12/20

Kent & Stowe stainless steel soil rake

£36.99

Weight 1,810g
Dimensions 158cm x 36cm
Warranty 15 years

14 tines. Stainless steel head. Long FSC ash wood handle. Robust and well made. Not well balanced. Poorer performance for the price. Hole for hanging cord.

Pros & cons

- ✔ Sturdy construction
- ✔ Comfy tapered handle
- ✘ Not well balanced
- ✘ Poor finish to seedbed

Design ★★★☆☆
Comfort ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆
Value for money ★★★☆☆

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3 X BAYS (1600h x 900w x 450d mm)	AMMP	£99.99	£119.99	£59.98	£17.99	£137.98
3 X BAYS (1600h x 900w x 450d mm) with 8 x 33.5L nestable Really Useful Boxes	AMRM	£149.99	£179.99	£83.97	£17.99	£197.98
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3 X BAYS (1600h x 900w x 600d mm) PLUS **1 X WORKBENCH** (915h x 1200w x 600d mm)	AQDS	£179.99	£251.99	£87.56	£17.99	£233.98

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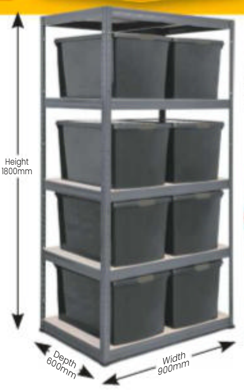

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SCORE: 16/20

Burgon & Ball RHS endorsed ground rake

£37.99

Weight 1,180g
Dimensions
164cm x 35cm
Warranty Lifetime

14 tines. Stainless steel bow head. FSC hardwood handle. Good length and well made. Rakes smoothly and well. Hanging loop. Long warranty.

Pros & cons
✔ Quality construction
✔ Well balanced and comfy
✔ Head held with sturdy rivets
✔ Rakes well
✘ Not efficient for tamping the soil down after sowing
✘ Not ideal for seed drills

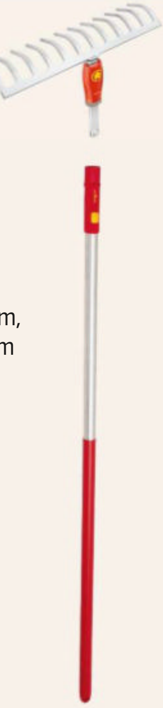
Design ★★★★☆
Comfort ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★☆
Value for money ★★★★☆

SCORE: 16/20

Wolf Garten multi-change soil and close toothed rake

£24.99/£19.99 for head, £17.99 for handle

Weight 490g (handle)
766g/378g (heads)
Dimensions Handle 142cm, heads 12cm x 30cm/19cm
Warranty 35 years



Pros & cons
✔ Easy to change heads
✔ Close-toothed rake head produces fine tilth
✔ Lightweight handle with long grip
✘ More expensive than buying a single rake
✘ Need both heads for best finish

Design ★★★★☆
Comfort ★★★★★
Performance ★★★★☆
Value for money ★★★☆☆

SCORE: 12/20

Corona Max heavy duty rake

£52.49

Weight 1,570g
Dimensions
168.5cm x 36cm
Warranty Lifetime

14 thick tines. Carbon steel head. Lightweight aluminium handle. Oval for extra strength. Heavy. Best for rough, stony soil.

Pros & cons
✔ Robust construction
✔ Long, comfortable grip
✔ Bright colour stands out
✘ Heavy and cumbersome
✘ Not balanced
✘ Not good for seed drills or tamping soil
✘ Expensive

Design ★★★☆☆
Comfort ★★★☆☆
Performance ★★★☆☆
Value for money ★★★☆☆

SCORE: 18/20

Sneeboer narrow tine soil rake

£96.95

Weight 1,250g
Dimensions
167cm x 24cm
Warranty 50 years on head; 1 year on handle

BEST BUY

10 sharp tines. Narrow head. Long ash wood handle with knob for grip. Good in the hand but heavy. Excellent quality and design.

Pros & cons
✔ Well made, quality materials
✔ Long, comfortable handle
✔ Small head good for access between rows
✔ Creates a fine tilth
✘ Heavy
✘ Expensive

Design ★★★★★
Comfort ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★☆

Our Best Buys to suit your needs

BEST BUY

Following our test, we awarded Best Buys to three soil rakes

Best budget buy

Wilkinson Sword carbon steel rake
£24.99

This rake is comfortable to use with a good length handle that's easy on the back, provided you're not too tall. It's nicely balanced and well made with sturdy fixings and a rust-resistant finish. One of the cheapest on test, this is the ideal choice for a gardener on a budget. Comes with a 10 year warranty.

Best mid-range buy

Greenman stainless steel soil rake
£34.95

This high-quality rake is beautifully made, has a comfortable handle and is nicely balanced for the back. It stood out for performance and quality for the price, and was a favourite with our team of testers.

Best lifetime buy

Sneeboer narrow tine rake
£96.95

Hand crafted from top-quality materials, this is a comfortable rake with a long handle that fits well in the hand. The narrow head fits well between rows and plants in borders, and close tines produce an excellent tilth. A must for kitchen gardeners.

Make sure your rake is light for ease of use but heavy enough to bite into cultivated soil unassisted

How to choose a rake

Having the right rake that suits you and your needs makes preparing and sowing your beds easy and pleasurable. Think about the following aspects before you choose:

■ Is it comfortable and the right fit? Rakes come in different lengths and weights, and it's important to pick one that suits you. The more rakes you can try for size, the better. A rake should feel good in your hand before it touches the soil.

Make sure the handle is comfortable, smooth and thick enough for a good grip. It's also important to find a rake that feels well balanced, while also being neither too heavy and tiring to use nor too light to really penetrate the soil without you pushing down hard. Choose a longer handle and a heavier weight if you're tall and strong, or a lighter one if that suits you better.

Weigh up the rake in your hands to see if it feels balanced, and if the handle is long enough for your reach.

■ Which materials do you prefer? A stainless steel head is rust resistant and usually more expensive, while carbon steel is stronger but cheaper, and often coated to preserve it against rust. Traditional handles are made from wood, which often balances the rake head nicely, and makes for a sturdy, warm-to-the-touch grip. Metal handles offer a strong alternative but can be cold to the touch, and slippery when wet.

■ Where are you working? Think about how much you'll use this rake, and what your soil conditions are like. If you have a plot with less than ideal soil, then something sturdy and strong will fit the bill, but a keen vegetable gardener with well worked beds might want something with more tines that are closer together to create a fine tilth quickly. Narrower heads are good for working between rows and in smaller spaces.

Where to buy

- **Burgon & Ball** burgonandball.com
- **Draper** drapertools.com
- **Greenman** greenmangardentools.com
- **Kent & Stowe** kentandstowe.com
- **Sneeboer** harrodhorticultural.com
- **Wilkinson Sword** wilkinsonsword-tools.co.uk
- **Wolf Garten** wolfgarten-tools.co.uk

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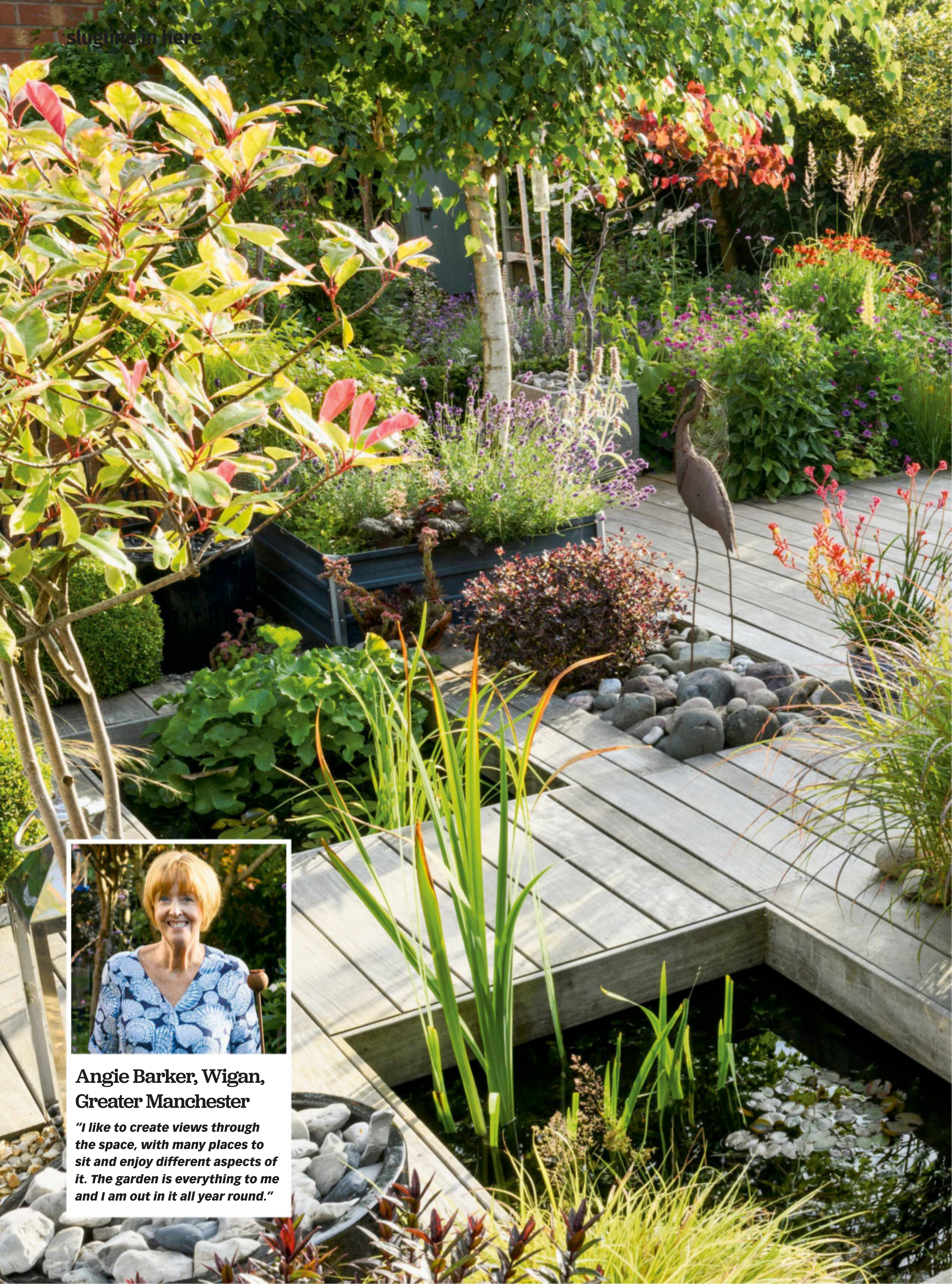

Angie Barker, Wigan, Greater Manchester

"I like to create views through the space, with many places to sit and enjoy different aspects of it. The garden is everything to me and I am out in it all year round."

Gardens of the Year
COMPETITION 2024
sponsored by Alpen

Angie Barker has created a calm, verdant space where there was once a bare yard without any sense of privacy

From bare to brilliant

Starting with a completely empty, heavily overlooked new build plot, Gardens of the Year finalist Angie Barker set about turning her space into an intimate, plant-filled sanctuary

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM **WORDS** SONYA PATEL ELLIS

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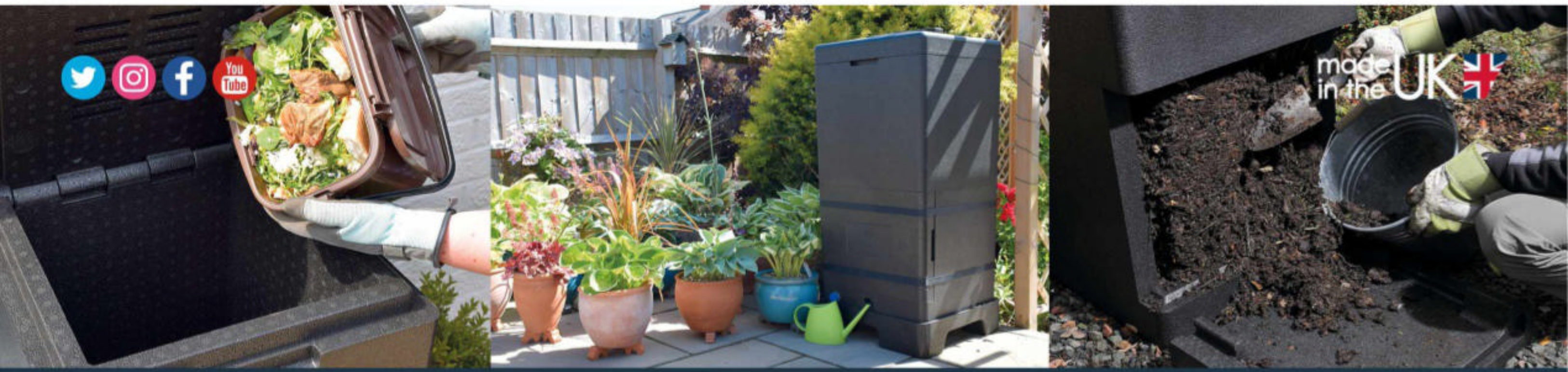

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Gardens of the Year
COMPETITION 2024
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Angie Barker and her family moved into their new-build house in Wigan two decades ago, partly for the relatively large corner plot garden that came with it. Over this time Angie has worked with the heavy clay soil and other issues, such as a lack of privacy from being surrounded by other houses, to create a secluded retreat.

The focal point is a central decked area in direct view of the house, complete with a dining table, relaxing seating area and system of ponds. Where boundary edges would once have been bare fence, they are now fully cloaked in lush green planting including collections of small trees, shrubs and climbers that help create privacy and support wildlife.

A system of winding brick paths provides avenues of exploration through seasonally uplifting borders of colourful flowers and grasses, and to points of connection or contemplation such as plant-filled pots, bee hotels or nesting boxes. Upon retirement, Angie also wanted to create a smaller garden-within-a-garden where she could sit and enjoy a morning cuppa, and so cleverly repurposed part of the paved drive into a lushly planted, gravelled courtyard garden. This is now one of her favourite spots, and a great example of the many benefits of turning grey to green.

How big is the plot?

It's 18 metres along the shorter side and 30 metres down the longer side, in an L-shape that wraps around the house and the conservatory. The courtyard garden, which was developed more recently on part of our allocated drive, is much smaller at about six metres across, fitting snugly in with the house.

How long have you been gardening here?

We've lived here 19 years, and have been gardening for that amount of time as there was absolutely nothing in it when we arrived – not a single plant.

No plants at all?

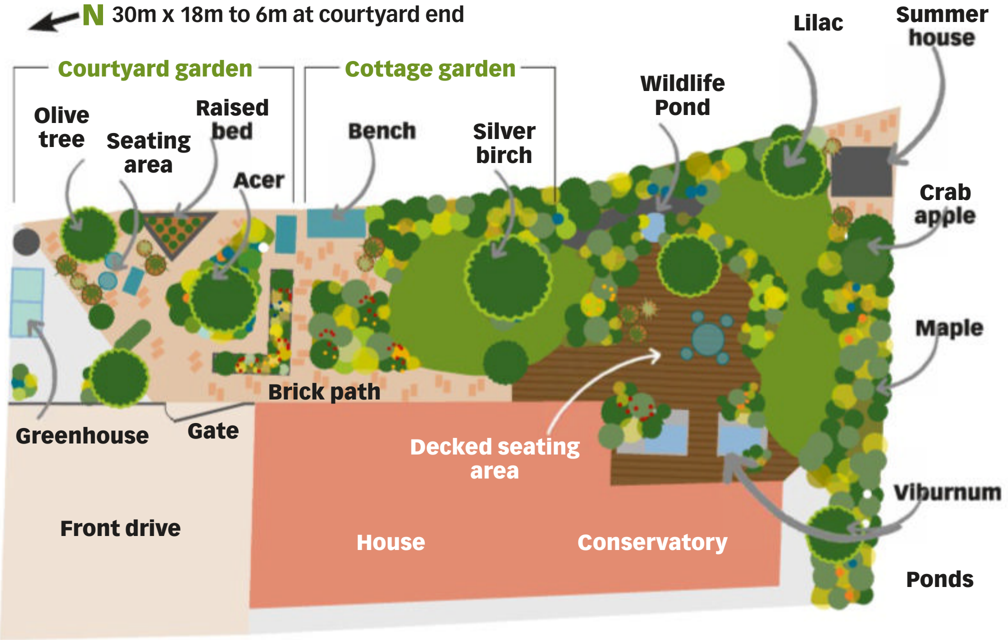
It was just a complete blank canvas, albeit with nettles, dock leaves and weeds that all had to be dug out over a period of time. The soil conditions were

① The summer house is secluded by tall plants, making it peaceful within and less dominant of the overall garden space

② Garden structures and permanent plant features such as the white stems of birch ensure there is always visual appeal

> *"Angie's clever use of structures and planting has created distinct areas"*
> Clive Johnson-Cooper, Gardens of the Year 2023 Judges' Choice and People's Choice Winner

Garden plan


N
30m x 18m to 6m at courtyard end
Courtyard garden
Cottage garden
Olive tree
Seating area
Raised bed
Acer
Bench
Silver birch
Wildlife Pond
Lilac
Summer house
Crab apple
Maple
Brick path
Greenhouse
Gate
Decked seating area
Viburnum
Front drive
House
Conservatory
Ponds

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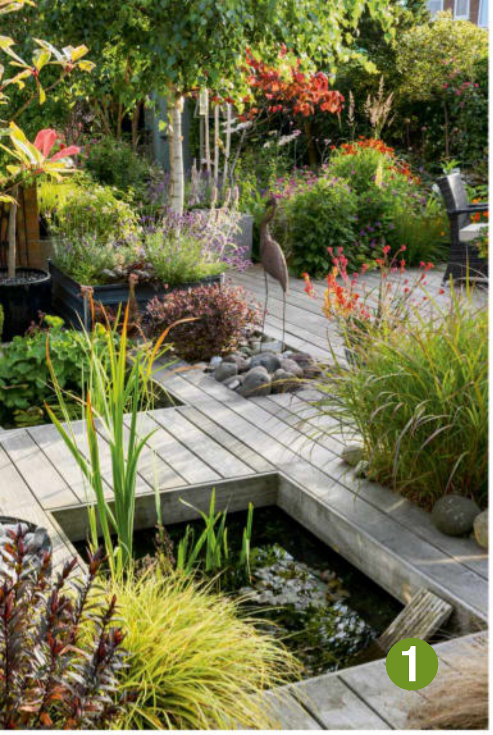

Gardens of the Year
COMPETITION 2024
sponsored by Alpen
2

> "It feels calm and cosy with a blanket of plants including bamboo, acers and a lot of differently coloured trees"
>
> **Irene Berry, Gardens of the Year 2023 finalist**

atrocious: very heavy, compacted clay, making it hard to plant up.

What were your first priorities in the garden?

It's a modern estate and we're surrounded by the windows of other houses, so the first thing was to get some trees in for privacy.

I wanted a calming space with a seating area in the middle of the garden. This might seem counter-intuitive if you're focusing on privacy, but if you're too near the boundary fences you're often next to someone else's patio and can hear every conversation. So, the starting point was imagining a tranquil zone in the middle and then adding the bigger stuff in – small trees and shrubs for seclusion and wildlife.

Where have you taken inspiration from?

Well, I've always liked gardening. My dad was a gardener, I've got loads of gardening books, and I always get the magazines. I visited York Gate Garden in Leeds a few years ago, from which I pinched a few ideas such as the sloping yew hedge. I've also picked up lots of inspiration from various RHS Chelsea Flower Shows.

Have you had any help along the way from friends, family or professionals?

I get my brother-in-law in to trim the trees when they need doing and a landscaping company built the deck and part of the pathway system. Everything else I did myself including the gravelled

① Ponds are cleverly integrated into the decked area, welcoming wildlife without detracting from the garden's clean, modern look

② One only has to walk a few steps to find another place to sit and enjoy the planting

③ Square containers and crisp clipped evergreen hedges create a clear structure around which loose, free planting can flow

Gardens of the Year
COMPETITION 2024
Sponsored by Alpen
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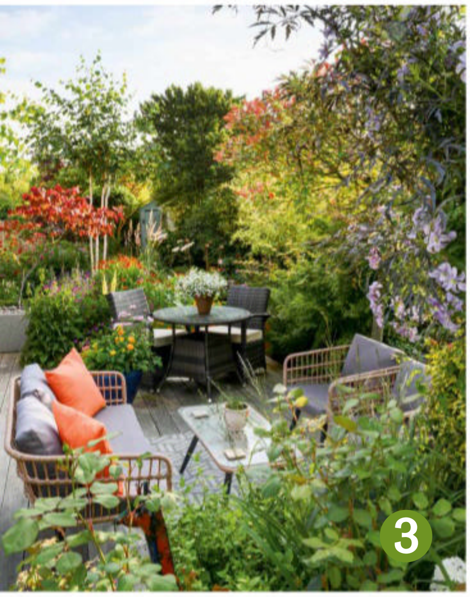
> “The space is very engaging, with lots of colourful planting. It must be a lovely space to spend time in with family”
>
> **Ann-Marie Powell, Gardens of the Year judge**



① Great care has been taken to limit the number of colours of hard landscaping, with weathered timbers matching paving

② Angie spends time in the garden every day, starting with a 6am cup of tea in the relaxed courtyard area

③ Having lots of seating areas turns one garden into several, so it can be enjoyed in a different way every new day

areas, the brick path, and all the planting and general maintenance.

What are the biggest challenges you have faced?

It was and still is the soil, because it’s such heavy clay. When it’s hot and dry you can’t even get a spade in it and the plants don’t thrive. When it’s wet, the water tends to sit there. I’m therefore always adding grit or compost, which has hugely improved the soil over the years, and everything now seems to grow.

What aspect of the garden are you most proud of?

The newer courtyard garden area in the corner took a bit of thinking outside of the box. After I retired, I was desperate for a small space that felt intimate and cosy. By losing some of the drive and adding some strategically placed fencing, I created a more private, peaceful space in which to sit and relax. I love the large acer, and the whole thing makes me smile.

What is your favourite part of the garden?

It depends what time of day it is, who I’m with and what I’m doing. I love sitting in the decked seating area when the family come round, my six o’clock morning cup of tea is down there in the courtyard, and the summer house is fabulous in the colder months.

How do you use the space on a daily basis?

I’m out here all the time, gardening or enjoying the space. Hubby will come out if he fancies a glass of wine in the sunshine, and our grandchildren do lots of exploring – the youngest one is obsessed with frogs so loves hanging out by the ponds in the decked area. I’ve got bee pools and bird boxes dotted around the place, too, and enjoy seeing all the wildlife. It’s just very important isn’t it? This is their garden too.

Angie is opening her garden for the NGS on 22 June, 2025.

ENTER Gardens of the Year 2025

Inspired by Angie Barker’s garden transformation and want to share your own space with readers of the magazine – and potentially win a great prize? This year’s Gardens of the Year competition is now open for entries. Find out more overleaf, and on the website, at:

GardenersWorld.com/garden-competition

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Beautiful alstroemeria

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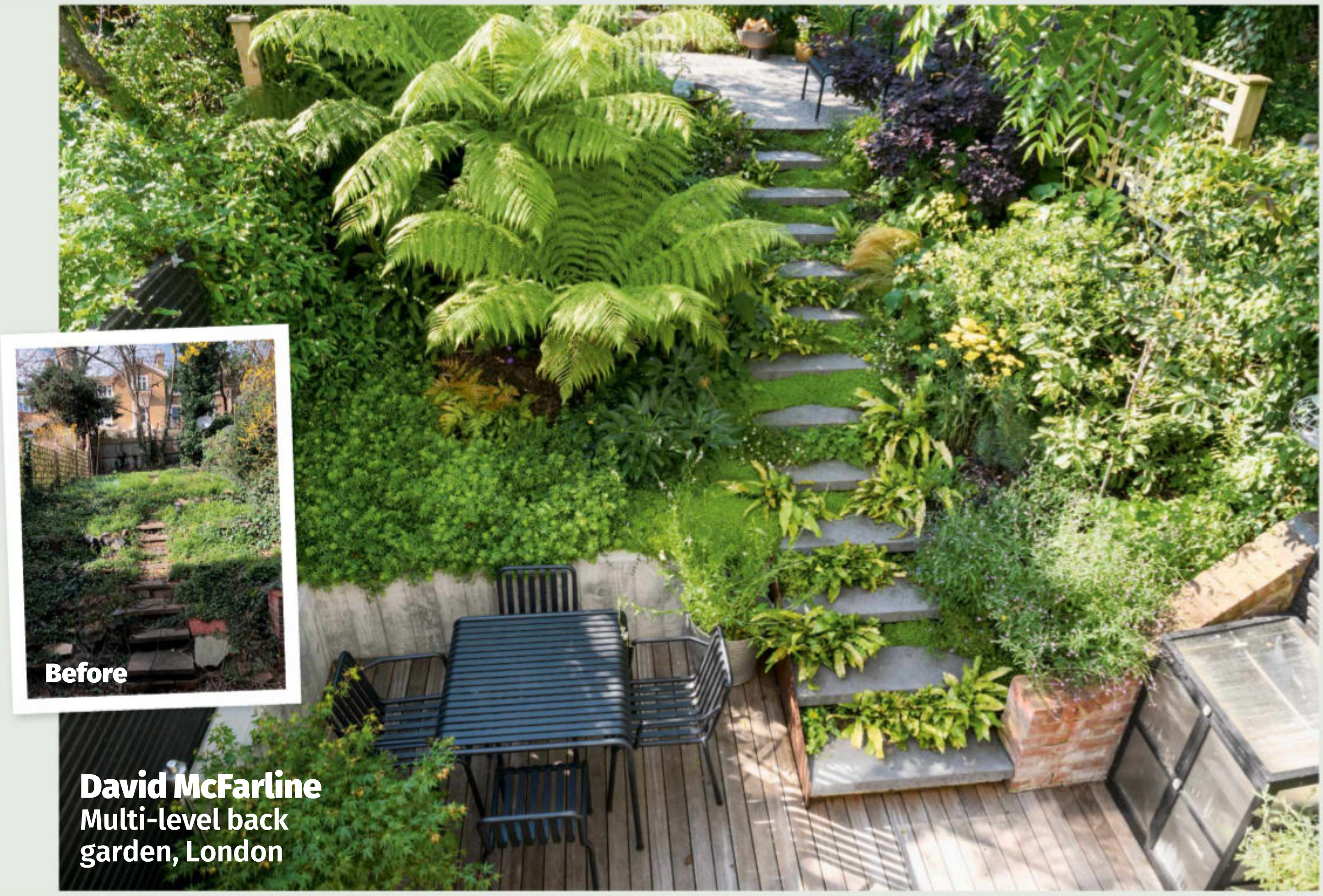
Could you be a winner?

Our annual hunt to find Britain's best gardens has begun!



Before

David McFarline
Multi-level back garden, London

Our **Gardens of the Year competition** is open for entries from **1 April until 9 June 2025**. Our judges – **Alan Titchmarsh**, **Arit Anderson** and **Ann-Marie Powell** – are keen to see gardens of varying shapes and sizes, great uses of space and fresh, innovative gardening. Take a look at the gardens of last year's winners for inspiration.

Winning formula

Some of last year's finalists underwent impressive garden transformations. Take David McFarline in London, whose sloping garden was full of rubble and hard to walk through. It's now a functioning and enjoyable back garden with different levels.

Jo and Andi Butler in Shropshire, who won the People's Choice award in 2024, created their atmospheric garden using elements from across the world to remind them of their travels. And Susan Downing in Warwickshire transformed the neglected garden in front of her cottage into a space with informal naturalistic planting, a pond and space to park the car.

If you've transformed your garden we want to hear about it. What interesting new elements have you included in your garden? What challenges have you overcome? Send us images that capture the essence of your garden for the chance to win.

What you could win

- **All finalists** will be awarded a professional photoshoot of their garden and will be featured in *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine*.
- There are a range of fantastic prizes to be won. Details in the coming months.

For full details and updates on all the prizes, plus terms and conditions, from 1 April, visit GardenersWorld.com/garden-competition

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM. ANNE-MARIE POWELL PORTRAIT: OLIVER DIXON

Gardens of the Year
COMPETITION 2025

Susan Downing
Gravel garden, Warwickshire

Jo and Andi Butler
Travel-inspired garden, Shropshire

Meet our expert judges

Once the Gardeners' World team have chosen our six finalists, a photographer will capture the beauty of each garden for a magazine feature. From these images our judges will choose a winner and runner up.

Alan Titchmarsh
TV presenter and regular contributor

Arit Anderson
Gardeners' World TV presenter

Ann-Marie Powell
Garden designer and presenter

How to enter

Our competition is open to gardens from anywhere in the UK, of any style or size, from small balconies and patios to large lawn gardens – everyone is welcome. we'd love to see what you've achieved.

1 **GO TO GardenersWorld.com/garden-competition** to enter.
2 **UPLOAD at least six photos** and tell us how you created your garden. Choose photos that show broad areas of your garden, not individual plants. Send photos that show the garden at its best – these could be from last summer. And we'd like to see a photo of the garden before you transformed it, plus a photo of you in your garden.
3 **ENTER** by **9 June 2025**.

Enter by 9 June 2025 at
GardenersWorld.com/garden-competition

Growing THE GOOD LIFE

Seed sowing is in full swing for **Sara Ward** this month, but one early harvest is especially delicious

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

Use several layers of paper to help ensure DIY pots last

> “With a little bit of **planning**, we can eat plot to plate **through the year**”

The early blossom is fading, young fruit is starting to set, and our summer harvests are still two or three months away. Early-sown seedlings may be looking strong but, as there’s still a chance of late frosts, we can’t plant them out just yet. This period of time is called the ‘hungry gap’, the time both for farmers and those growing at home when the winter harvests are over but the spring crops are not yet ready to be gathered in. However, with a bit of planning, we can be eating plot to plate right through the year.

We love our asparagus bed in spring – it took a few years of patience before we could start reaping the rewards, but it was well worth the wait. Once you’ve eaten freshly cut asparagus, anything air-freighted or stored for days in the fridge pales by comparison. Along with a plentiful supply of eggs from the chickens, it’s wonderful to be able to gather such a luxury product while all the other crops are waiting for their moment to shine.

Gardeners' World offer

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Gardening is so beneficial for the mind and body, and whether you've got acres to tend, a compact plot or a city balcony, we'll help you create your perfect sanctuary at great prices. With our trusted partners, you can view a huge range of plants, bulbs, trees, gifts and much more.

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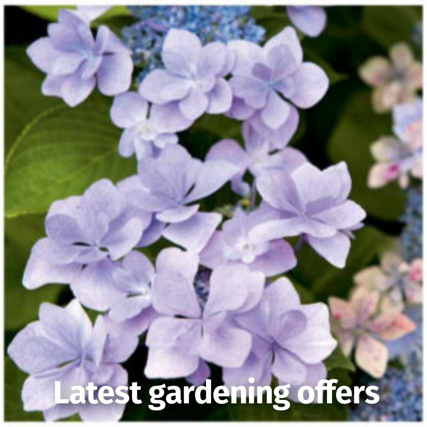

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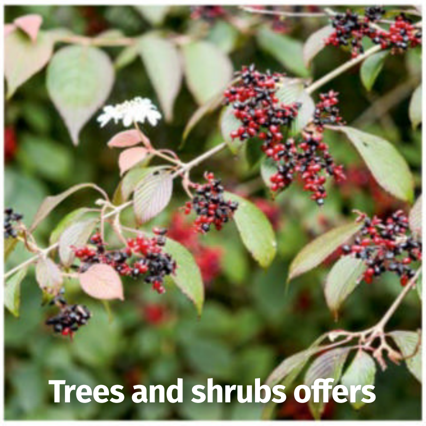

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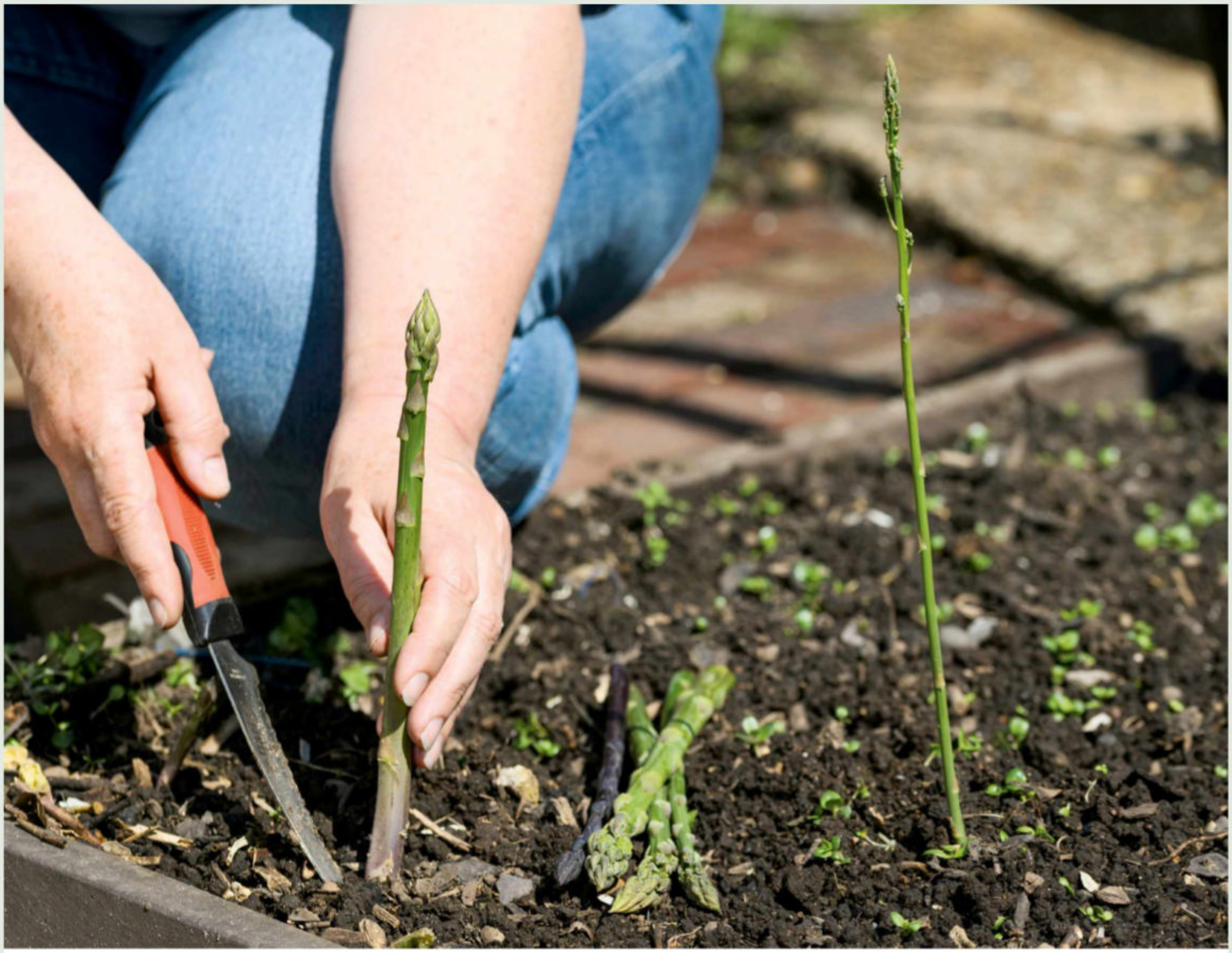


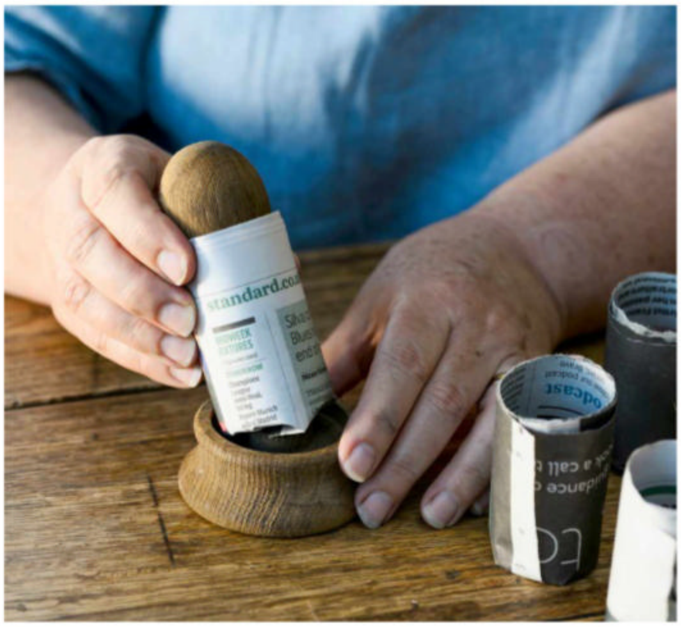
Many happy returns

While it seems a bit of a luxury, and does require a designated patch long term, growing asparagus is not particularly difficult and is really rewarding. It's a perennial vegetable, faithfully cropping year on year for up to two decades, so is worth the investment of planting correctly. Each plant can produce up to ten spears each season, but we only harvest from April to June to ensure the plants have a chance to recover for next year. Asparagus likes a sunny bed with reasonably free-draining soil, and I give it a generous mulch of well-rotted chicken manure in late winter to protect and nourish the roots.

It's so exciting watching for the first few tips to finally peep through the soil. I count them early in the mornings, and sometimes I discover three or four new spears starting to emerge by early evening.

We harvest the spears that shoot up from underground 'crowns', and once our chosen spear is cut the plant transfers its energy into producing others. I wait until

ABOVE Cut down diagonally into the soil to harvest asparagus, but leave thin spears **RIGHT** A paper-pot maker saves time and ensures consistent sizes



> “It's so exciting watching for the first few tips of asparagus to finally peep through the soil”

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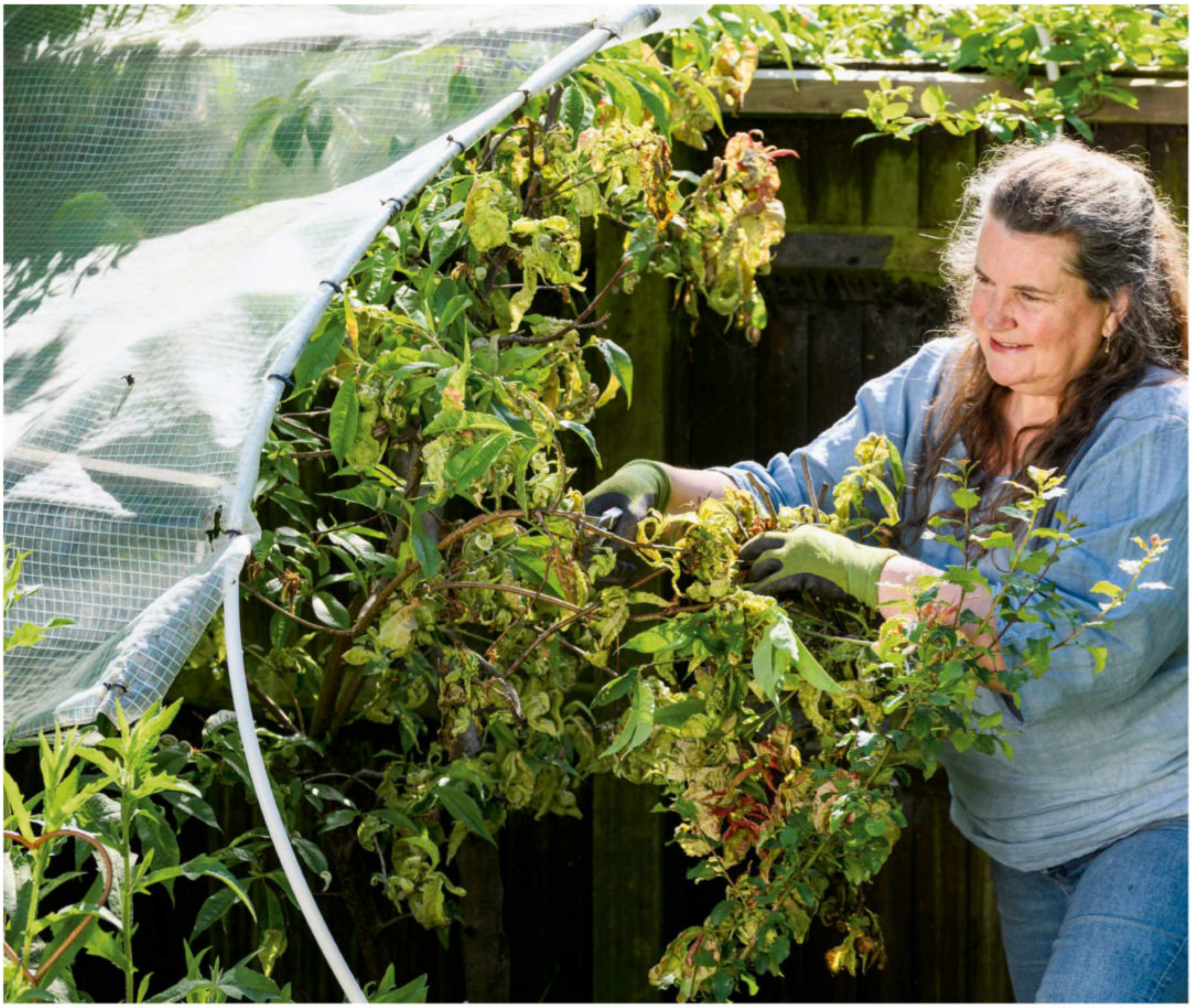

Peach leaf curl enjoys the wet, humid April climate, but can be made less of a problem by covering the tree against frequent spring rains

the spear is the same length as the blade of my curved, serrated asparagus knife – around 12cm – and cut down diagonally, going a few centimetres down below the surface of the soil.

It's worth checking daily to see which spears are ready to cut, as they can become hard and woody if left to grow too big.

Season of plenty

Growing your own asparagus not only saves money and time in the shops, but it is also better for the environment. It's been calculated that a 250g pack, even when grown locally and in season, is still responsible for 270g of climate emissions. Now is the time to enjoy this delicacy, as when it's out of season and imported it has been calculated to have nearly 18 times the environmental impact.

Another way to be more sustainable is to start off seedlings in homemade paper pots. Repurposing with this easy technique saves buying new plastic or fibre pots and you can make them as tall as you like – which is handy for deeper-sown seeds such as runner beans.

While beans can be sown directly in the soil, supporting their germination and early growth in a controlled environment helps to protect them from mice. It also means that the stems are just that bit tougher when plants are finally planted out within reach of the slugs and snails.

> “We keep our peach tree protected from early spring rain to avoid peach leaf curl infection”

Not so peachy

April is well known for its showers of rain, which is great for harvesting and saving in butts for later in the year. The downside, however, is the effect of this rain on *Prunus* fruit trees such as peaches, nectarines and almonds, as it can help spread a fungal infection called peach leaf curl. This, as you would expect, causes leaves to curl up tight, restricting photosynthesis and causing the fruit to drop prematurely. We keep our peach tree protected from early spring rain with a polythene arch covering the tree from front to back. Regular inspections give an opportunity to remove diseased leaves and branches where needed. We generally find that the parts of our peach tree kept under cover thrive with this protection, but it's important to trim back branches growing out of the cover and remove all infected material to stop further spread.

APRIL Jobs

✔ **Transplant seedlings** If you started sowing early, some of your seedlings will be ready to start pricking out. Fill individual pots with peat-free potting compost and, using a thin stick, create a hole in the middle to receive the root. Hold the seedling by a seed leaf if possible and carefully ease it out of the seed tray, using the stick as a lever under the roots, and transplant it into its new home. If the seedlings are long and leggy, plant them deep. Gently water in.

✔ **Thin out radishes** This crop grows so quickly, and if the plants run out of space they will struggle to swell their bright spheres properly. While I hate to discard anything that I've sown, thinning out each row of radishes will reduce competition for nutrients, water and light, allowing the crop to reach its full potential. Don't forget to plant them every other week for regular pickings throughout the coming months.

✔ **Earth up early potatoes** As soon as you see foliage from potato plants growing around 10cm tall above the soil, start earthing up the plants by lifting spadefuls of loose soil from either side of the row to cover most of the stem. This gives more opportunity for extra roots to emerge from the now-buried stems, which should in turn lead to more potatoes developing. Keep earthing up over the coming weeks for a bumper crop, ensuring all developing potatoes are covered with soil as they grow to avoid them turning green. This regular earthing up also protects plants from frost and smothers unwanted weeds.

✔ **Check up on beehives** As London can be slightly warmer than other parts of the country, I start my regular beehive inspections in April. I'll check that each queen is present and laying eggs, that they have enough food stores and that they have enough space. As the weather warms up for easy flying and there are plenty of flowers with pollen and nectar available, colonies will be rapidly increasing in size, and we don't want them splitting and swarming.

ABOVE Earthing up potato plants protects plants from frost and gives bigger crops **LEFT** Keep garlic well weeded this month or it will very quickly become inundated

Gardeners' World offer

GROW YOUR OWN FOR LESS

If you've been inspired to produce your own food, go to **GardenersWorld.com/gyo-offers** for a great selection of GYO offers to suit whatever size space you have.

NEXT MONTH Sara is picking broad beans to make hummus, planting out squash and training her grapevine

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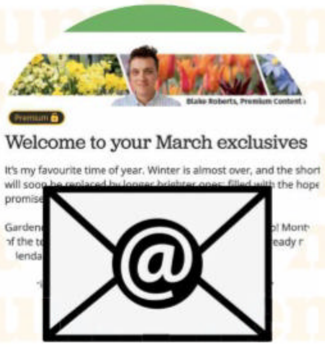
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Herbal delights

Give your patio a boost with herbs that will transform your cooking and look good, too. **Tom Brown** has four ideas to get you started

When we think of summer containers, our first thoughts are usually towards bright colour, but let's take a moment to consider growing herbs. In just one container, you can grow enough herbs to add flavour to a variety of dishes and create a focal point.

The world of herbs is vast, and not all of them require hot, dry Mediterranean conditions. There are several, such as parsley and sweet woodruff, which will grow well in shade and have the potential to brighten those darker corners in the garden.

It's easy to buy ready-to-go plants from a garden centre or a supermarket to create your fantastic displays, but don't forget many herbs can also be grown from seed. This makes herbs more affordable, and you'll have seedlings left over for friends, too.

Make a refreshing peppermint tea

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM. LOCATION: WEST DEAN GARDENS, WEST SUSSEX

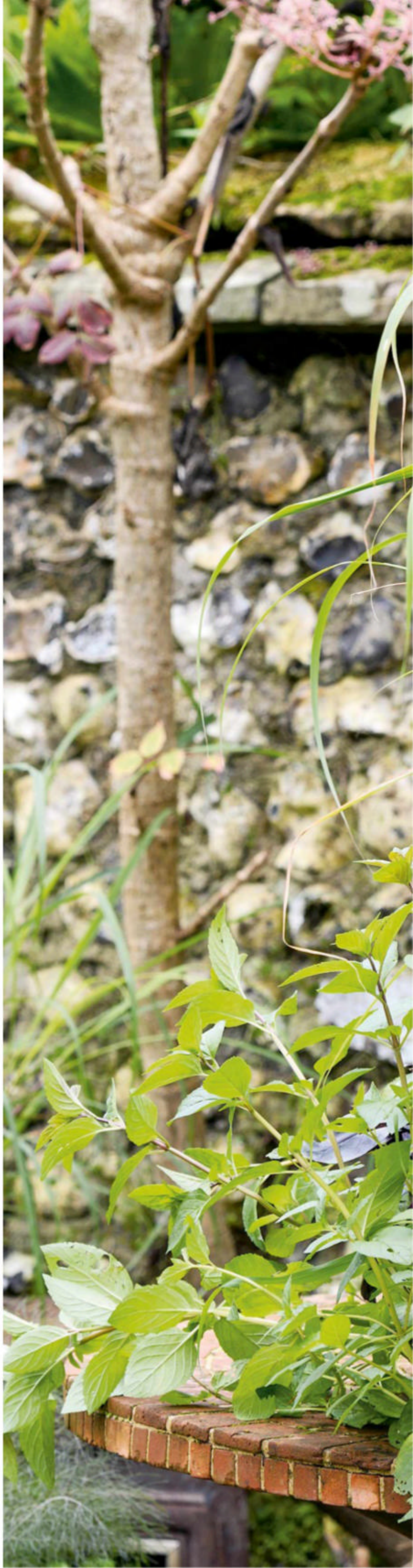
Time for tea

You don't need to rival Jamie Oliver in the kitchen to make the most of a potful of herbs. Most of us enjoy a nice cup of tea, so this pot is full of foliage that can be used to make herbal infusions.

As long as you can keep the plants trimmed and regularly watered, there's no reason why a small pot that fits on a patio table can't sustain a group of healthy herbs for the summer. Choose herbs that thrive in the same conditions.

Plants used (1 of each):

- **Dark opal basil**
- **Chamomile**
- **Lemongrass**
- **Mint chocolate peppermint**
- **Corsican rosemary**



TOP TIPS

When the herbs outgrow their pot, simply repot them individually or upgrade the group to a larger container

Save money on herbal teas by planting herbs such as chamomile, basil and peppermint

Pick Your Own Delicious Home Grown Strawberries This Summer!

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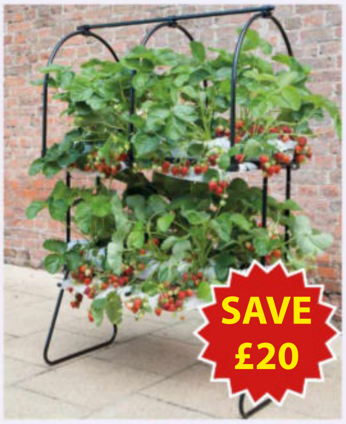
Agriframes Strawberry Tabletop

The perfect way to grow strawberries, ensuring heavier yields and better quality fruit! Manufactured from strong 15mm black polymer coated galvanized steel tubing with moulded fittings, the frame comes complete with a bird net and hoops to support the net above the fruit. The tabletop will accommodate 20 plants to produce three successive crops over a three year period before the plants & growbags need to be replaced.


SAVE £20

XAF001 **Strawberry Tabletop**
£148.95 inc. p&p*

SAVE £20 - Tabletop for only £128.95 inc. p&p* **when you purchase a minimum of 24 strawberry plants per tabletop.**

*** Mainland UK only. Please phone for p&p charges to Highlands & Islands.**

Strawberry plants are easy to grow and all they require is a sunny, sheltered spot. Plants can be spaced 30cm (12in) apart in the open ground. Alternatively they can be grown in growbags (10 plants per bag) or containers.

Our hand graded 'frozen' (cold-stored) strawberry plants are raised under the PHPS scheme and are guaranteed to be free from pests and diseases. The advantage of 'frozen' plants is that they produce fruit the first summer followed by bumper crops for the next 2-3 years. Provided they are planted outside by the end of July, they will crop just 60-90 days after planting. **Delivery is within 28 days. Offer closes 30th April 2025.**

MALLING CENTENARY (early) - This new variety was specifically bred to put flavour back in to the berry. The fruits are very sweet and juicy. Heavy cropping. *Usually £22.95*
STR025 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £20.65 inc. p&p**

MARSHMELLO (mid) - A fantastic midseason variety, described by French chef Raymond Blanc as the sweetest strawberry he has ever tasted! The large, glossy-red berries are not firm enough for the supermarkets but it is a very popular variety on 'Pick Your Own' farms and has become a firm favourite amongst home gardeners. Excellent disease resistance. *Usually £22.95*
STR031 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £20.65 inc. p&p**

FENELLA (late) - Offers an exciting combination of heavy yields, quality fruit and very good disease resistance. The large glossy berries have an excellent, distinctive sweet flavour and are mildly aromatic. Can tolerate very heavy rain. *Usually £22.95*
STR015 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £20.65 inc. p&p**

MALWINA (very late) - This fabulous tasting variety is an excellent choice for the garden as it is easy to grow and very disease resistant. The large berries are exceptionally sweet. Very late ripening, cropping well into August when most other summer fruiting varieties have finished cropping. *Usually £22.95*
STR018 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £20.65 inc. p&p**

MARA DES BOIS (perpetual) - Combines the aromatic flavour of the wild alpine strawberry with the fruit size and yield of the modern cultivars. When fully ripe, the medium sized berries are extremely fragrant and develop an intense flavour and aroma similar to the woodland strawberry. Resistant to mildew. Ripens Aug-Oct. *Usually £23.95*
STR016 12 plants - **NOW ONLY £21.55 inc. p&p**

Asparagus Offer

Spring is the perfect time for planting!

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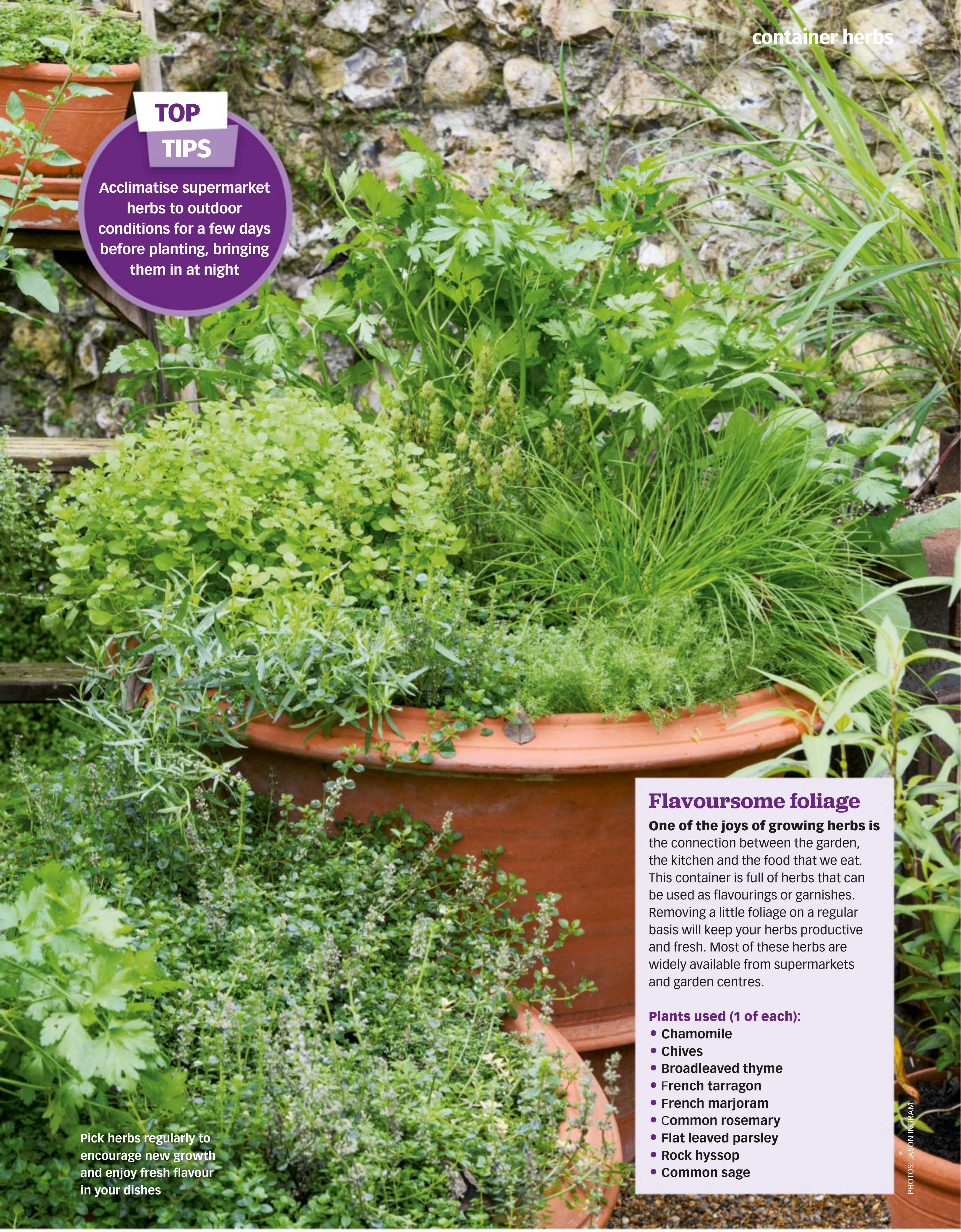

TOP TIPS

Acclimatise supermarket herbs to outdoor conditions for a few days before planting, bringing them in at night

Pick herbs regularly to encourage new growth and enjoy fresh flavour in your dishes

Flavoursome foliage

One of the joys of growing herbs is the connection between the garden, the kitchen and the food that we eat. This container is full of herbs that can be used as flavourings or garnishes. Removing a little foliage on a regular basis will keep your herbs productive and fresh. Most of these herbs are widely available from supermarkets and garden centres.

Plants used (1 of each):

- **Chamomile**
- **Chives**
- **Broadleaved thyme**
- **French tarragon**
- **French marjoram**
- **Common rosemary**
- **Flat leaved parsley**
- **Rock hyssop**
- **Common sage**

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

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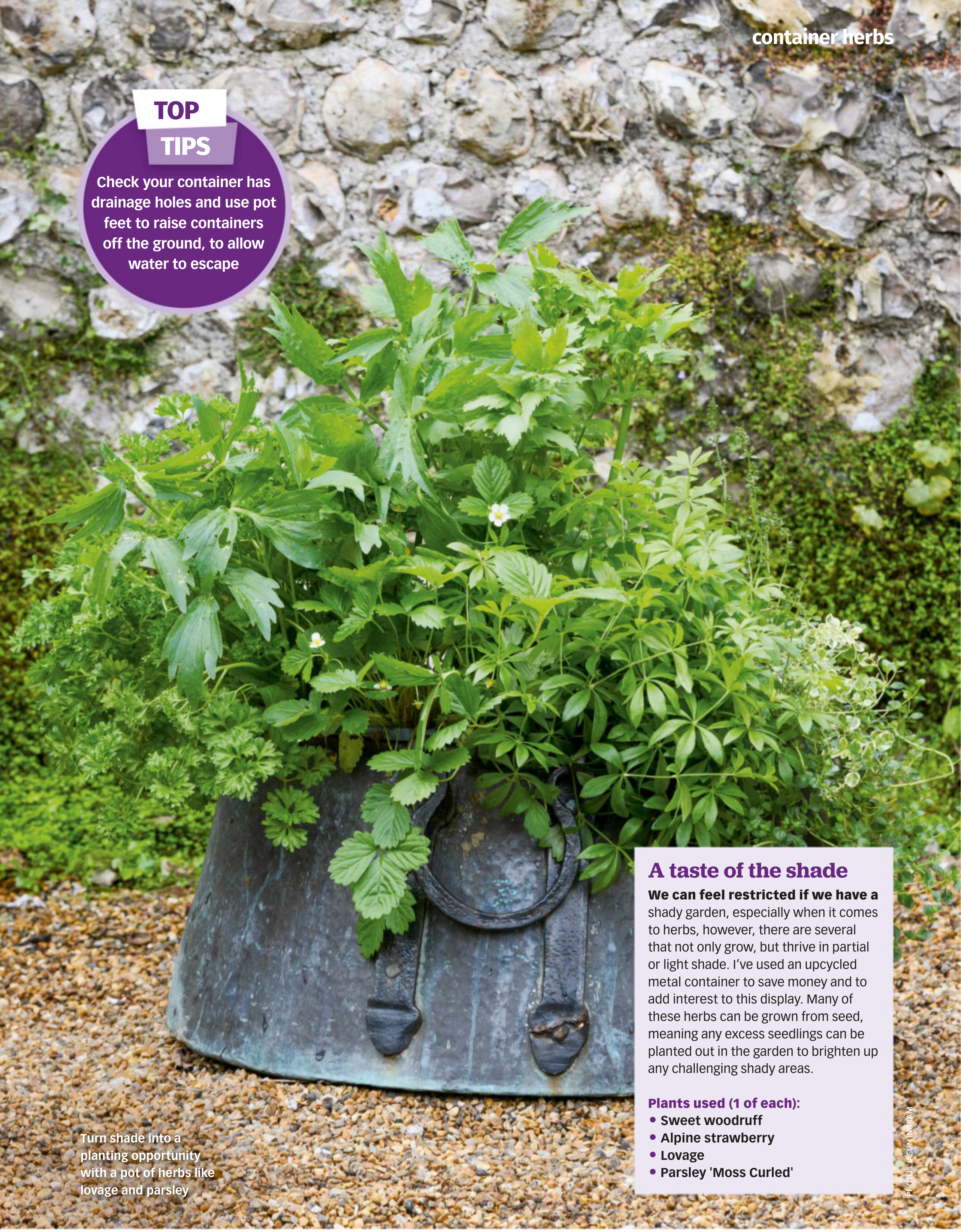
TOP TIPS

Check your container has drainage holes and use pot feet to raise containers off the ground, to allow water to escape



Turn shade into a planting opportunity with a pot of herbs like lovage and parsley

A taste of the shade

We can feel restricted if we have a shady garden, especially when it comes to herbs, however, there are several that not only grow, but thrive in partial or light shade. I've used an upcycled metal container to save money and to add interest to this display. Many of these herbs can be grown from seed, meaning any excess seedlings can be planted out in the garden to brighten up any challenging shady areas.

Plants used (1 of each):

- **Sweet woodruff**
- **Alpine strawberry**
- **Lovage**
- **Parsley 'Moss Curled'**

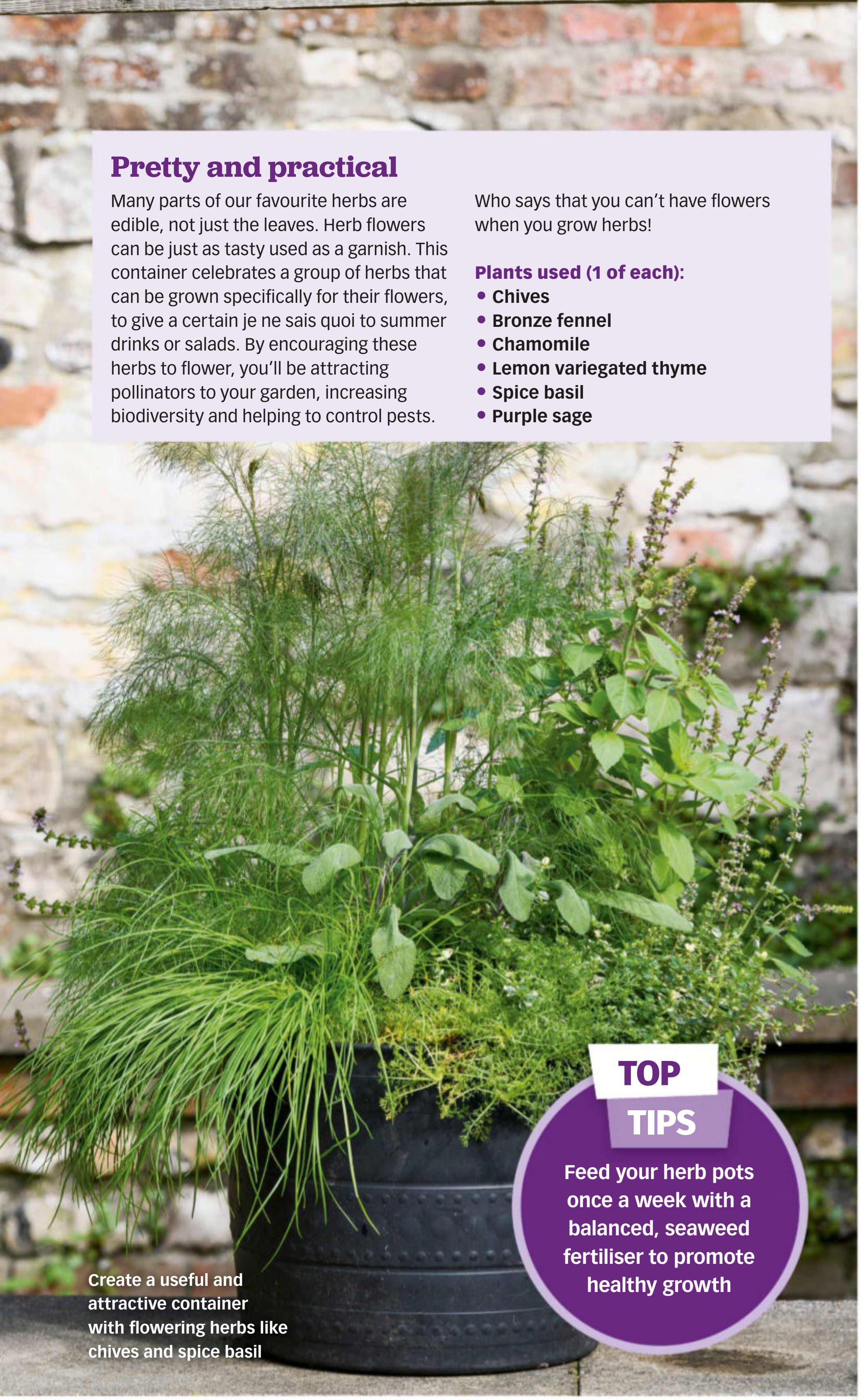
PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

Pretty and practical

Many parts of our favourite herbs are edible, not just the leaves. Herb flowers can be just as tasty used as a garnish. This container celebrates a group of herbs that can be grown specifically for their flowers, to give a certain je ne sais quoi to summer drinks or salads. By encouraging these herbs to flower, you'll be attracting pollinators to your garden, increasing biodiversity and helping to control pests. Who says that you can't have flowers when you grow herbs!

Plants used (1 of each):

- **Chives**
- **Bronze fennel**
- **Chamomile**
- **Lemon variegated thyme**
- **Spice basil**
- **Purple sage**



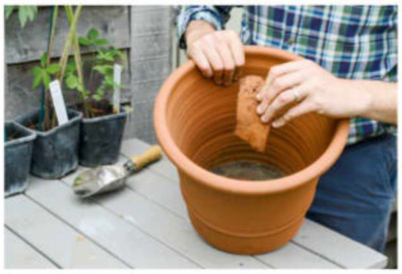
Create a useful and attractive container with flowering herbs like chives and spice basil

TOP TIPS

Feed your herb pots once a week with a balanced, seaweed fertiliser to promote healthy growth

How to create a herb container

1 **Herbs** need good drainage. Make sure there are several drainage holes or one large hole. Cover large holes with a piece of broken terracotta to prevent compost falling out.



2 **Fill** the container with peat-free compost, leaving a few centimetres gap at the top of the pot. Arrange your plants until you're happy with the effect before you commit to planting.

3 **Once** you're satisfied with the design, plant your herbs at the same level as they were in their plastic pots and firm in well, ensuring there are no air pockets around the roots.

4 **Top** dress your container with a layer of grit (2cm deep) to retain moisture and suppress weeds. Water well and feed weekly with a seaweed-based fertiliser to keep herbs healthy.

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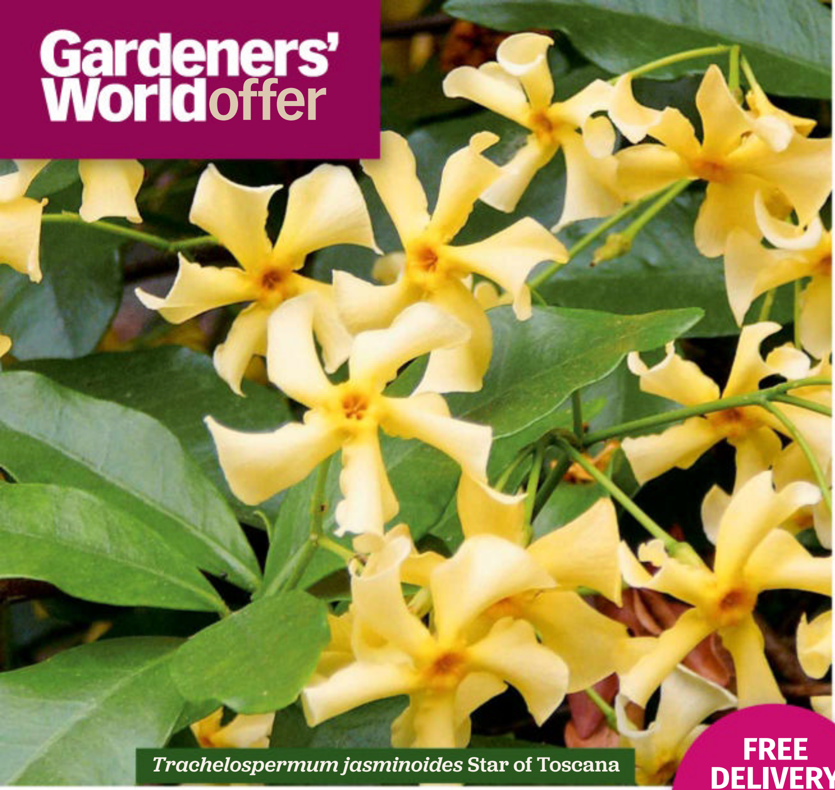
PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM



Trachelospermum jasminoides Star of Toscana

T. jasminoides

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Star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) is an evergreen climber, producing clusters of scented, star-shaped flowers. It's perfect for growing up a warm wall or fence, and slow growing enough to suit a small garden. Plant it near a seating area where the scent can be enjoyed.

Included in this collection:

- ***Trachelospermum jasminoides* Star of Toscana**

This long-flowering star jasmine has pale-yellow flowers with a dark-yellow centre and an exotic fragrance. In winter, the glossy green foliage takes on attractive deep-bronze tones.

Height x Spread 9m x 6m
Flowers Jun-Aug

- ***T. jasminoides***

The species star jasmine is a robust and prolific climber, with star-shaped flowers that will fill your garden with fragrance throughout summer. It is perfect for covering a boundary and looks good year round, with evergreen foliage that turns bronze-red in winter.

H x S 9m x 3m **F** Jun-Aug

- ***T. asiaticum* 'Pink Showers'**

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H x S 4m x 3m **F** Jun-Sep

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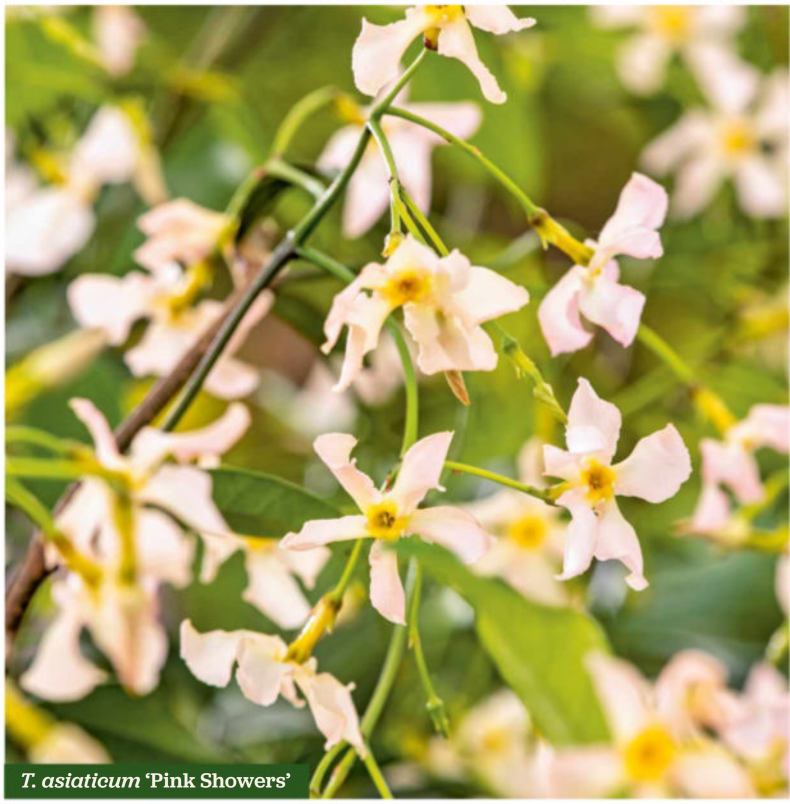

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April
Growing guide

Get greenhouse crops underway and look ahead to long-term harvests by growing perennials

Sow indoors 🟪 **Plant/sow outdoors** 🟩 **Harvest** 🟧

	Key crops for April	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
	Artichokes (globe) Rich in prebiotic fibre, which boosts good gut bacteria, improves digestion and may reduce the risk of bowel cancer.			🟩	🟩			🟧	🟧	🟧				**Tips** In the first summer, remove any flower buds that start to form to let this perennial concentrate on getting well settled in. **Sow** ↓ 1.5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 75cm apart ⤢ 90cm between rows
	Asparagus These tasty shoots contain rutin, a plant compound that aids circulation and supports the body's use of vitamin C.			🟩	🟩	🟧	🟧							**Tips** Plant the crowns in a trench and keep weed free. Don't harvest any spears in the first two years, while the plants establish. **Plant** ↓ 20cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 30cm apart ⤢ 30cm between rows
	Borlotti beans Beans are nutrient dense, and a good source of vegetable protein and heart-friendly anti-inflammatory polyphenols.			🟪	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩 🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧			**Tips** Available as climbing or dwarf varieties. Apply a thick layer of mulch around the plants to hold moisture in the soil and suppress weeds. **Sow** ↓ 5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤢ 45cm between rows
	Cucumbers Hydrating and low in calories, these refreshing fruits are best eaten with the skin on to optimise nutrient intake.		🟪	🟪	🟪	🟩		🟧	🟧	🟧				**Tips** Grow these vigorous climbers up supports and pinch out the shoot tips when they reach the top. Keep them well watered. **Sow** ↓ 2cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ⤢ 60cm between rows
	Lettuces Large loose-leaf varieties provide more nutrients (including vitamin C, iron and folate) than those with dense heads.	🟪 🟧	🟪 🟧	🟪 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟪 🟧	🟪 🟧	🟪 🟧	**Tips** Sow small batches every few weeks, and protect from slugs and snails. Water regularly in summer to prevent flowering (bolting). **Sow** ↓ 1cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 35cm apart ⤢ 40cm between rows
	Melons Being 90 per cent water and rich in minerals such as potassium, sodium and magnesium, melons support hydration.			🟪	🟪	🟪		🟧	🟧	🟧				**Tips** Best grown in a greenhouse or cold frame, but may be worth trying outdoors in a very warm, sheltered, sunny site. Keep well watered. **Sow** ↓ 2cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 60cm apart ⤢ 1m between rows
	Onion sets As well as gut-friendly fibre, onions contain protective plant compounds, with red varieties outshining white ones.	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩			🟧	🟧	🟧	🟩	🟩	🟩	**Tips** Onions dislike competition, so keep them weed free, especially in the first few months after planting. **Plant** ↓ 5cm deep, with the tip just showing **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤢ 30cm between rows
	Sweetcorn This sweet treat combines energising carbs and blood-sugar balancing fibre, plus eye-protective lutein and zeaxanthin.				🟪	🟪			🟧	🟧				**Tips** Sow indoors, then transplant into a warm, sunny site in May or June. Arrange in a grid rather than rows, to aid wind pollination. **Sow** ↓ 4cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart, in a grid
	Watercress Packed with skin-friendly antioxidants, including vitamins C, E and beta-carotene, as well as cancer-protective compounds.			🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟩 🟧	🟧	🟧			**Tips** Grow in a pot and stand in a tray of water, replacing the water frequently. Harvest the shoots regularly. **Sow** ↓ On surface (uncovered) **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤢ 20cm between rows
	Winter squash Rich in beta-carotene, which we convert into vitamin A in the gut, this fruit helps to support healthy skin and immune function.				🟪	🟪				🟧	🟧			**Tips** Sow indoors, then plant out after the last frost. Dig plenty of garden compost into the planting site to enrich the soil. **Sow** ↓ 2cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 90cm apart ⤢ 90cm between rows

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Gardeners' Question Time

Our experts tackle your queries, which include growing dwarf apple trees, looking after grapevines, and dog-friendly plant choices

Pippa Greenwood
One of the top experts on pests and diseases, Pippa gardens using organic methods.

Kirsty Wilson
Kirsty is Head of Gardens at Balmoral Castle and is a presenter on BBC's *Beechgrove Garden*.

Matt Biggs
Matt trained at Kew and has been gardening professionally for more than 30 years.

Q Which are your top five plants for wildlife?

Viv Gelder, Cardiff

A KIRSTY SAYS There are so many to choose from and the best options will depend on your conditions, but these are my favourites. First, our native teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) – its flowers are loved by bumblebees and the seedheads attract goldfinches. It's a tall, architectural plant and provides visual interest in winter.

Then there's ivy, perfect for a shady spot, with year-round foliage. Its autumn flowers attract a wide range of pollinators, including wasps, butterflies, moths, bees and hoverflies, which in turn are food for birds and other animals.

Buddleia is great for attracting butterflies, producing summer flowers in shades of mauve, purple, white or orange. For much earlier in the year, hellebores are perfect for shady areas. They're a valuable food source for queen bumblebees emerging from hibernation.

Finally, there's *Sorbus*, such as the rowan tree, which is ideal for a small space. Its berries come in a choice of colours, from red to orange, yellow, pink and white, and provide a winter feast for birds.

Q&A TEAM ANSWER
Attracting wildlife

Rowans serve up a nutritious feast of berries for birds in autumn

Sunflowers attract pollinating insects and seed-eating birds

A PIPPA SAYS Difficult as it is to chose just five, I would say honeysuckle, apple tree, sedums, ceanothus and sunflowers.

Honeysuckle provides nectar for bees and other pollinators, and roosting or nesting sites for birds, and later in the year birds will also enjoy the berries.

Apple blossom serves up nectar for insects and the fruit is a valuable food for all sorts of creatures. The tree also offers birds places to roost and nest.

Sedums, especially those with broad, open flowerheads, such as *Hylotelephium* 'Herbstfreude', are great for bees and hoverflies.

Ceaonothus are real magnets for insects – when my children were small, our ceanothus was nicknamed the 'buzzing bush' as it literally buzzed with bees and other insects when in flower.

And, finally, sunflowers are brilliant for insects when in flower, and then birds and other creatures can enjoy the seeds.

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/SANDRA STANDBRIDGE

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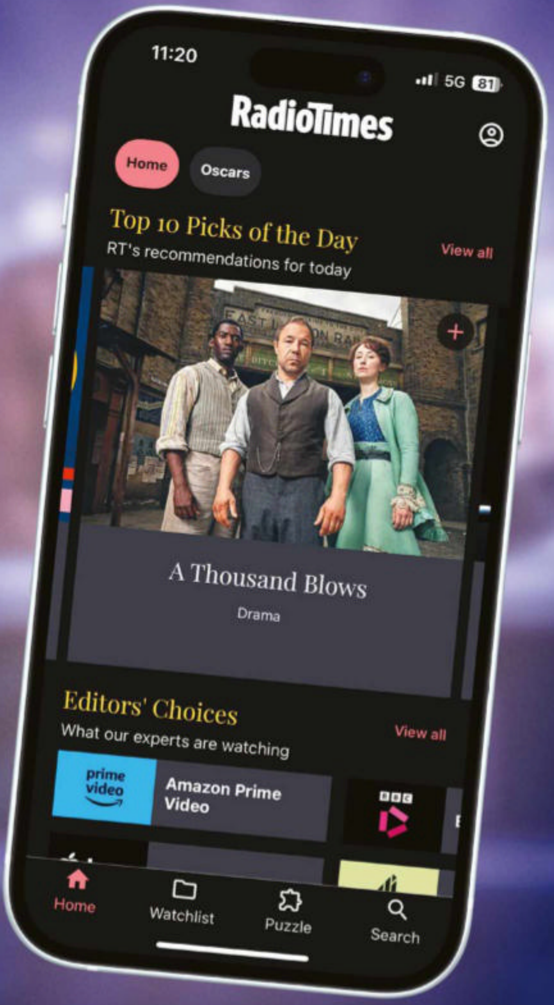
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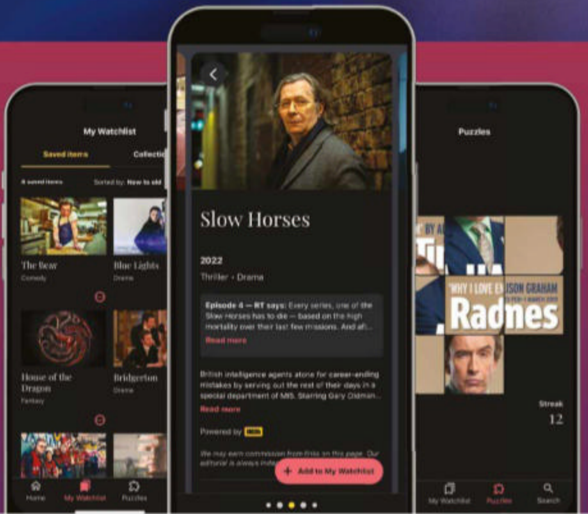
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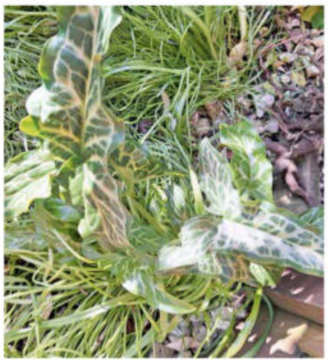
Q Is this a weed?

Kevin Keeble, by email

A KIRSTY SAYS No, this looks to be an *Arum italicum* 'Marmoratum', which is a herbaceous perennial with attractively patterned foliage. In spring it produces an upright, finger-like spike (spadix) covered with tiny yellow flowers and a sheath (spathe) that envelopes the flower spike like a hood.

After flowering, the upright spike produces eye-catching orange-red berries in autumn.



***Arum italicum* 'Marmoratum' has boldly patterned leaves**

Q Which flowers aren't poisonous to dogs?

Victoria Cooke, Swansea

A PIPPA SAYS It is always difficult with animals, as their reactions can vary and some will nibble plants more than others. As you rightly say, foxgloves are a known hazard, but you could try verbascums instead. Do also take a look at the *HTA Guide to Potentially Harmful Plants* at bit.ly/hta-harmful. It includes risk information not just for humans but for dogs and other pets too.

Verbascums aren't toxic so are a safe alternative to foxgloves

Elegant and fragrant *Rosa* Grace is ideal for a container in full sun

Q Can I grow a rose on a hot, exposed balcony?

Michael Dysarz, by email

A MATT SAYS When choosing a rose for a container on a balcony or other tight space, make sure it's one that's not too thorny, so you can move around it without getting scratched. Roses grow better with plenty of space for their roots, so choose a decent-sized pot. Use peat-free multi-purpose compost with added John Innes, which is not too heavy and retains moisture and nutrients.

I would suggest *Rosa* Grace, whose apricot flowers are dark towards the centre and paler at the edges, with a tea rose fragrance. Also consider the small repeat-flowering polyantha rose 'Katharina Zeimet', reaching just 60cm tall, with dainty white scented flowers, or bright scarlet 'Marlena', reaching just 50cm.

Ensure the compost never dries out, to help avoid powdery mildew, and feed with slow-release rose fertiliser in spring and with liquid rose fertiliser as needed. Don't feed after August, as the soft growth that this encourages is easily damaged by winter winds.

Q Can I grow potatoes in compost where rats have been seen?

Ed Anderson, by email

A PIPPA SAYS Rats often frequent compost heaps, but I've not heard of anyone getting sick from eating cooked veg grown in such compost. However, do take care, as the bacterial infection Weil's disease can be contracted from rat urine. It can enter the body via cuts or scratches, or if traces of urine on your fingers reach your eyes or mouth.

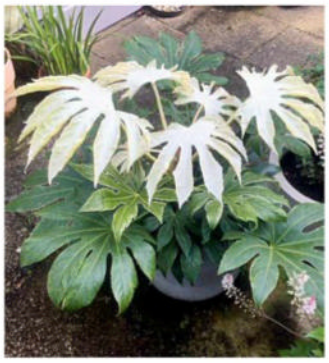
Rats and many other creatures often forage in compost heaps

Lilac's fragrant flowers are an early-summer treat

Q What is this plant?

Felice, London

A KIRSTY SAYS Your plant is a lilac (*Syringa*). These shrubs make wonderful garden plants, producing gorgeous, fragrant flower clusters in early summer. Depending on the variety, the flowers may be purple, mauve, pink or white. Lilac grows best in full sun, in moist but free-draining soil that's rich in organic matter.



***Fatsia* 'Tsumugi-shibori' has dramatic white young leaves**

Q What's up with my fatsia's leaves?

Susan Collingham, East Sussex

A MATT SAYS You say the leaves were covered in brown dust over winter – don't worry, this is just a defence to deter predators from eating them. You also say the new leaves are very pale – white young leaves may be caused by too much sun, iron deficiency or cold temperatures. The new leaves of the variety 'Tsumugi-shibori' can be white or green, then turn variegated.

PHOTOS: GETTY/EMER1940, STEPHANE ETIENNE; JASON INGRAM

Q&A gardeners' question time

Q What can I grow in a pot with rhubarb?

Ruth Brooks, Leicestershire

A MATT SAYS Rhubarb needs fertile, moisture-retentive compost and a sunny location. There will be little room for other plants once your rhubarb is well established, but you could plant bulbs like daffodils, snowdrops or tulips that will appear before most of the rhubarb's leaves, as well as smallish plants such as tiarella, pulmonaria or hostas while there is space.

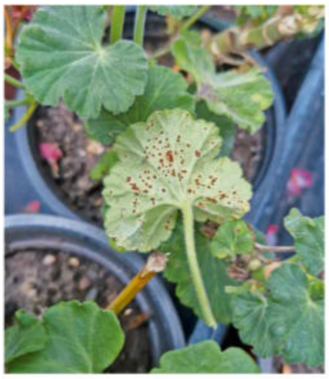
Q Is there a way to save my rusty pelargoniums?

Peter Field, Hertfordshire

A PIPPA SAYS Pelargonium rust causes yellowish discoloration on the upper leaf surface and dark-brown spore pustules on the underside, often in neat, concentric rings.

First remove the most heavily infected or ideally all infected leaves. It's also vital to improve air circulation around your plants, as this disease spreads more rapidly in damp conditions. I have managed to clear plants of infection by putting them in a warm, well-ventilated room, but I can't promise this will work every time. I've also known infected plants to die if not treated.

You may decide to use a suitable fungicide product, but avoid wetting the foliage and ensure you also improve the air circulation.



Remove all leaves with spore clusters on the underside

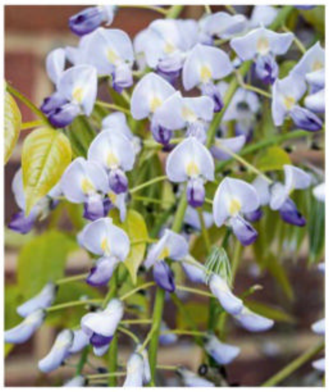
Q Which border flowers will thrive in clay soil with lots of slugs?

Jo Chambers, Bristol

A KIRSTY SAYS First add well-rotted manure to your border to help break down the clay and provide organic matter for your new plants. Then mulch in late winter or early spring each year to keep on improving the soil structure, adding nutrients and deterring weeds. As for slugs, try organic pellets or beer traps – just don't use your best beer!

Bearing in mind your preferred colour scheme of mauve, blue and yellow, my suggested perennial choices are: *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low', *Geum* 'Gimlet', *Betonica officinalis* 'Hummelo', *Geranium* Rozanne, *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen', *Aster × frikartii* 'Mönch' and any pale-blue eryngium. Then for spring, daffodils, tulips and alliums.

Choose border plants to give a mix of contrasts and harmony



Wisteria's beautiful, fragrant flowers are worth the wait

Q When will my year-old wisteria flower?

Lee and Michelle, Lancashire

A PIPPA SAYS It's likely to be at least five years, probably longer, before your young wisteria flowers I'm afraid. I have rarely seen them bloom reliably until their main stem is at least 2.5cm in diameter. However, the growing conditions, such as soil type, location and your local climate, will all affect the rate at which your wisteria grows and how soon it becomes mature enough to flower.

Looking after your plant well may also speed things up a little. So keep the soil adequately moist during dry weather, especially while the plant is still getting established. Consider giving it a feed in spring, and once it's a good deal larger and nearing the time when flowers might be developing, also start feeding with sulphate of potash to encourage flowering.

Q How has my dead wisteria grown a shoot from its base?

Lesley, by email

A MATT SAYS There are usually two parts to a wisteria plant – the rootstock, below ground, and the scion, or top part, comprising the stems and branches of your chosen variety. These are grafted together, but the graft can fail, causing the top growth to die as it no longer has a supply of nutrients and water.

When this happens, the rootstock, which is still alive, may send up shoots at the base. Wisteria varieties are grafted onto *Wisteria sinensis* rootstock, which is an attractive plant with flower clusters up to 30cm long.

Check if there's life in the main plant by removing a small piece of bark with your fingernail – if it's green beneath, then it's still alive. If it's dead, either remove the whole plant or just remove the dead part, then train the stem growing from the rootstock to fill the space. It will then be a different plant, so the flowers are likely to be different and may take time to appear, but this is the quickest and easiest solution.

Q&A
HOT
TOPIC
Wisteria issues

Wisterias are usually healthy, vigorous and long lived plants

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM; TIM SANDALL

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Q&A gardeners' question time

Q How should I care for a 25-year-old grapevine?

Paul Wilson, Norfolk

A KIRSTY SAYS Vines tend to like a sheltered, sunny location and if yours is in a greenhouse that will help, especially when it's cold! Apply a mulch of well-rotted farmyard manure annually, which will help retain moisture around the roots and promote a good crop of grapes. Keep the vine well watered too, especially during dry spells.

Grapevines are vigorous and need space and supports to climb up. To get the best crop, they need pruning, training and fruit thinning through the growing season. Late November to December is the best time to prune, then in spring and summer train and cut back new shoots to allow light in to ripen the fruit. Wine varieties tend to be more successful in the UK.

Prune hard in winter and trim off excess new growth in summer

Q Can I grow two apple trees in my small plot?

Terry Hoye, by email

A MATT SAYS Yes, but do buy trees on a dwarfing M27 rootstock, which restricts them to just under 2m tall and wide. They will require staking for the whole of their lifetime and need feeding, watering and mulching in spring, as they won't produce a large root system. They will crop quickly and reach maturity in about four years. To ensure you get good crops, choose two varieties that flower at similar times (pollination partners).

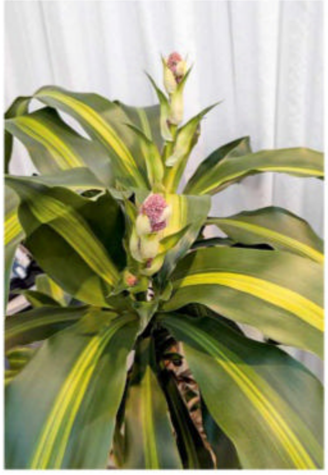
Trees on dwarfing rootstocks are compact and easy to harvest

Q Is it unusual for this house plant to flower?

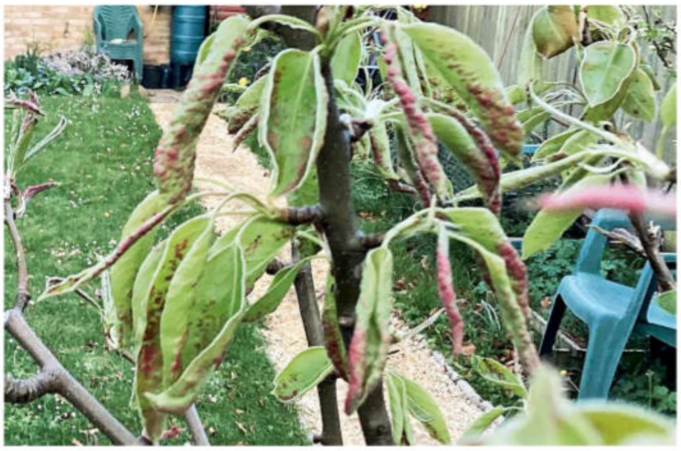
Hilary Knight, by email

A MATT SAYS Your plant is *Dracaena* Cintho. These attractive house plants will bloom if happy and mature enough, or if stressed and making a last bid to reproduce. It looks like yours is happy!

These plants prefer bright, indirect light and moist but not waterlogged compost. Keep out of draughts and direct sun, and mist the leaves if the air is dry. Apply a general fertiliser monthly during the growing season.



***Dracaena* Cintho isn't just a foliage plant, it may bloom too**



These red, distorted leaves are caused by pear blister mites

Q What's happened to my pear tree's new leaves?

Janet Naumburger, Essex

A PIPPA SAYS The raised, discoloured areas and the general distortion on the leaves is caused by *Eriophyes pyri*, the pear blister mite. When these feed, they produce chemicals that upset the normal growth of the leaf cells, causing numerous tiny galls to develop. This in turn allows the mites to feed on the plant cells lining the galls, which are more nutritious to them than unaffected tissue. The initial damage is often a pale-green colour, then it reddens and by the end of the season the leaves may appear almost black. This might look worrying, but even a fairly heavy infestation is very unlikely to have a significant impact on your pear tree.

The level of infestation may vary from year to year and is unlikely to disappear completely, however there are no controls to be recommended.

Catch up with

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BBC RADIO 4

Send in your questions

Email **Q&A@gardenersworld.com** (including the county you live in) or write to **Q&A, *GW Magazine*, Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT**

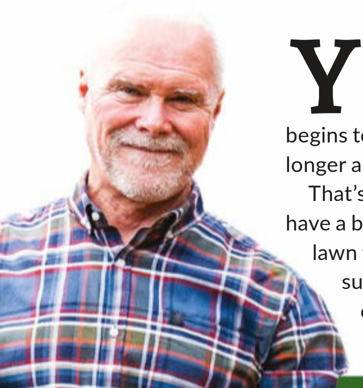
We regret that we cannot offer a personal garden advisory service.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS

advertisement feature

Four steps to glorious grass

It's finally time to begin crafting your lawn, and Webb Garden Power's Adam Woolcott knows just how to get the best results



Your lawn is one of the biggest indicators that the long-awaited warmer weather is finally on the horizon. After months of puddles, worm casts and mud, the grass begins to awaken. And though it's gentle at first, as the days grow longer and sunnier, so the grass becomes greener and stronger.

That's when gardeners come in; each decision you make can have a bearing on growth and coverage. So, if you want your lawn to look neater and lusher than ever this spring and summer, just follow Webb Garden Power's gardening expert Adam Woolcott's four foolproof tips.

1. Mow at the right time

Generally, March is a great time to begin cutting your lawn regularly, but you'll need to be guided by the weather and ground conditions. If it's still very cold with frosts and lots of moisture underfoot, then wait a while longer until things improve.

2. Cut your grass gradually

Your lawn thrives with frequent, light cuts. Avoid a low first cut, as it can cause discolouration or scorching in the sun. For tall grass, start with your mower at its highest setting, then mow weekly, gradually lowering the height to your desired level.

3. Consider adding stripes

Large lawns in particular lend themselves to being striped, but this can still be achieved on smaller lawns as well – the secret is to use a mower that has a rear roller! You'll get the best results by cutting up and down from the point you view your lawn, slightly overlapping the cut each time.

4. Choose the right lawnmower

When buying a new lawnmower, consider three key factors: the size of your lawn, the desired finish (e.g. fine cut for ornamental lawns or side discharge for rough grass), and the power source (manual, electric, petrol, or battery). For guidance, check out Webb's lawnmower advice section on the website.

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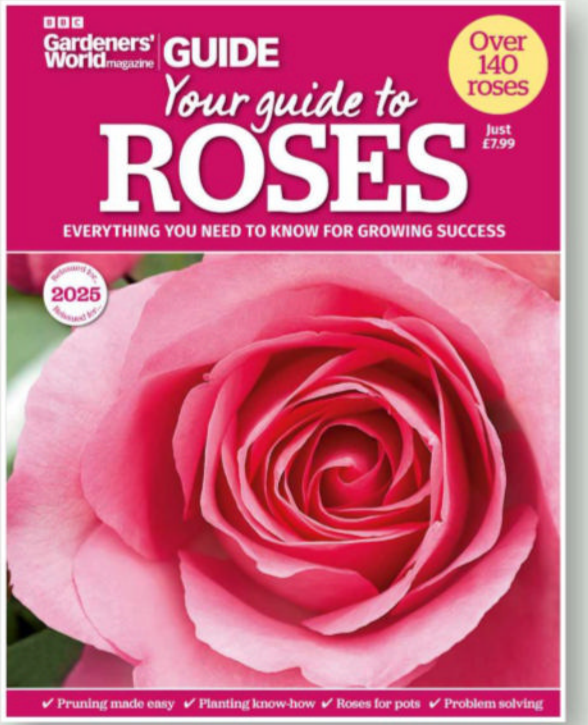

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Puzzles

Take a break from the garden with these brain-teasers

Step by step

By changing one letter each time to make a new word, can you transform BIRD into NEST in five steps or less?

B I R D

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

N E S T

Find the flowers

P	E	S	Y	N	Y	S	I	A	D	A	L
D	S	L	R	A	H	N	C	H	T	I	F
A	Y	I	O	S	Y	A	E	R	L	S	R
F	L	S	R	C	D	E	O	A	E	H	E
F	R	E	H	I	R	W	C	T	U	T	E
O	D	R	L	P	A	O	P	I	L	N	Y
D	E	N	I	L	N	A	E	E	R	I	C
I	H	L	G	U	G	P	G	R	S	C	A
L	U	A	E	M	E	S	E	L	I	A	L
T	D	F	I	S	A	D	W	O	T	Y	E
I	O	F	R	E	E	S	I	A	N	H	P
Y	L	I	L	R	E	T	S	A	E	Y	N

Can you find these ten bloomers which are popular for bouquets and displays?

EASTER LILY
DAFFODIL
DAISY
FREESIA
HYACINTH
HYDRANGEA
IRIS
LILAC
PEONY
TULIP

Secret six

Use each letter in the grid once to answer all the clues

R	T	E	L	R	S
P	M	I	C	R	E
C	R	D	N	T	R
U	R	S	C	U	P
A	O	C	I	L	A
U	A	K	D	N	O

A spring bulb _ _ _ _ _ _ _

A type of tulip _ _ _ _ _ _

A root veg _ _ _ _ _ _

Common disease _ _ _ _ _ _

A small fruit tree _ _ _ _ _ _

Latin name meaning 'sweet' _ _ _ _ _ _

The plot thickens

Here are six veggies to sow in April. We've swapped the letters for numbers. Can you crack the code?

22 1 3 8 6 15 13 3 25 8

13 3 3 20 1 17 17 20

6 25 2 25 13 1 3 12 3

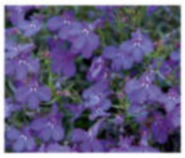
12 4 7 8 25 6 15

13 1 17 6 6 17 2 7

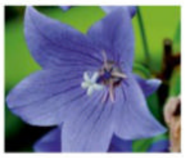
9 25 1 1 17 18

Border blues

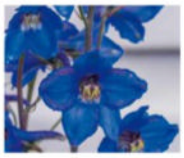
Here are four plants famed for their blue beauty – but they've got a bit muddled. Can you match the correct genus and species to each picture?



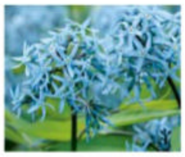
PLATYCODON ERINUS



DELPHINIUM TABERNAEMONTANA



AMSONIA GRANDIFLORUM



LOBELIA GRANDIFLORUS

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/TRUDIE DAVIDSON, ALEX MANDERS, ELENA VAFINA

Puzzle solutions over page ▶

Crossword

Put down your trowel, pick up a pen and exercise those brain muscles instead…

ACROSS

1 It's a good time to __ seedlings of crops sown in March (4,3)

7 '__ Scent' is a popular pink-flowering magnolia (6)

8 __ *muscipula* is better known as Venus flytrap (7)

9 Popular spring bulbs with large, showy flowers (6)

10 *Daphne* __ is a fragrant early spring bloomer (5)

11 'Snow__' is a dwarf cherry with masses of white flowers (7)

14 *Viola* '__ Quin' produces white and purple April blooms (6)

17 Latin name meaning splendid, as in *Chaenomeles* x __ (7)

19 Lords and __ is one of many names for *Arum maculatum* (6)

20 Bloodleaf is a name for this genus of American ornamentals (7)

21 Popular evergreen shrub, many from New Zealand (4)

22 *Primula* '__ Jervis' is a pretty double-flowered primrose (3)

23 'Midnight at the __' is an exotic name for a hosta (5)

DOWN

1 Infant amphibian making its appearance in ponds (7)

2 Genus of bloomers including morning glory (7)

3 Latin name meaning egg-shaped, as in *Catalpa* __ (5)

4 Organic matter that accumulates under grass plants on a lawn (6)

5 *Althaea officinalis* is also known as marsh __ (6)

6 Common name for capsicum (6)

11 Refers to a leaf or flower with no stem of its own (7)

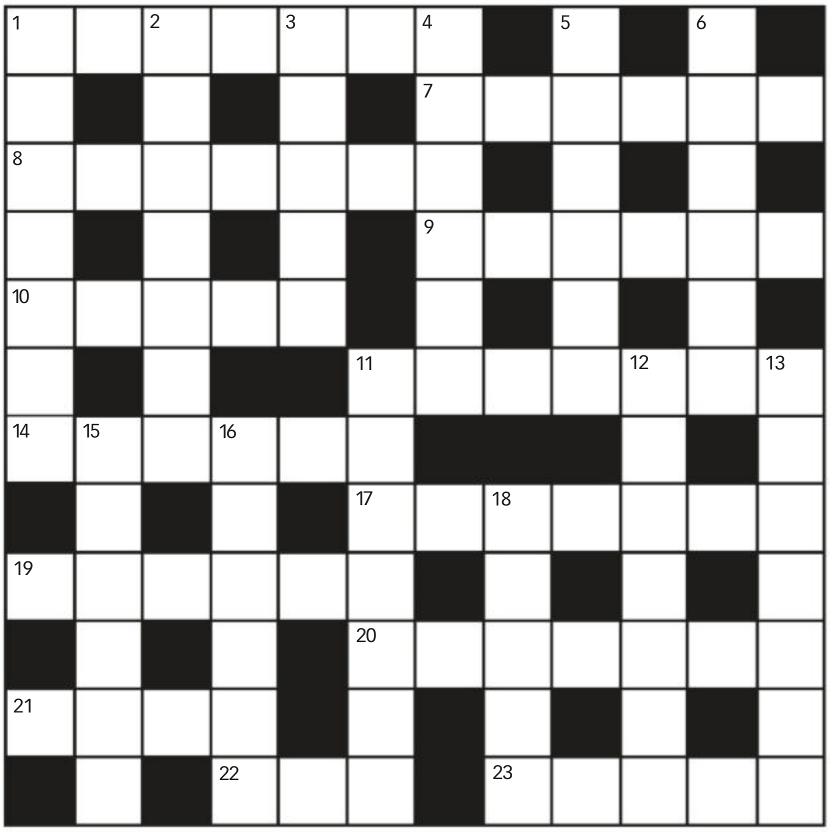
12 The eggs of these elongated insects hatch in spring (7)

13 The male reproductive parts of a flower (7)

15 Specialised organs of photosynthesis (6)

16 Add aquatic plants such as water __ to ponds now (6)

18 *Flore* __ is a Latin name meaning 'double flowered' (5)



CROSSWORD AND PUZZLES COMPILED BY NICOLA TREVETT

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

Secret six Crocus, parrot, turnip, canker, medlar, dulcis
The plot thickens French bean, beetroot, calabrese, spinach, broccoli, marrow
Step by step There are several possible solutions, including: bird bind bend bent best nest
Border blues *Platycodon grandiflorus*, *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, *Delphinium grandiflorum*, *Lobelia erinus*

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

ACROSS 1 Thin out **7** Heaven **8** Dionaea **9** Tulips **10** Odora **11** Showers **14** Elaine **17** Superba **19** Ladies **20** Iresine **21** Hebe **22** Sue **23** Oasis
DOWN 1 Tadpole **2** Ipomoea **3** Ovata **4** Thatch **5** Mallow **6** Pepper **11** Sessile **12** Earwigs **13** Stamens **15** Leaves **16** Irises **18** Pleno

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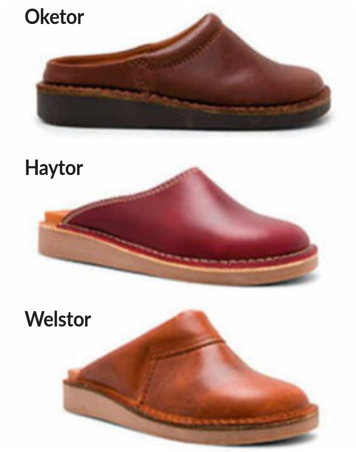

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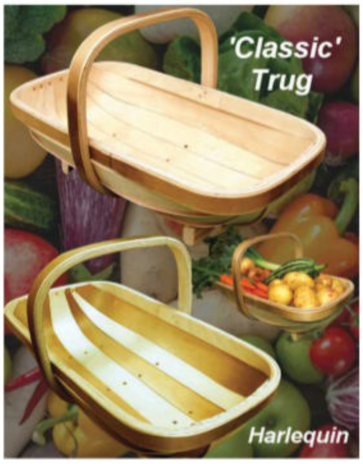

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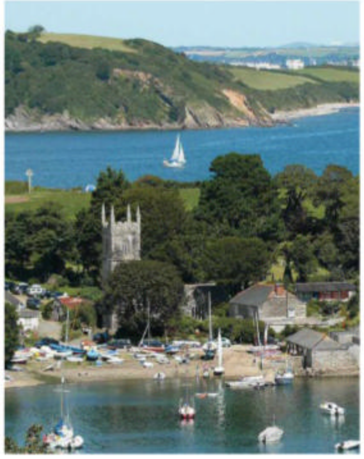

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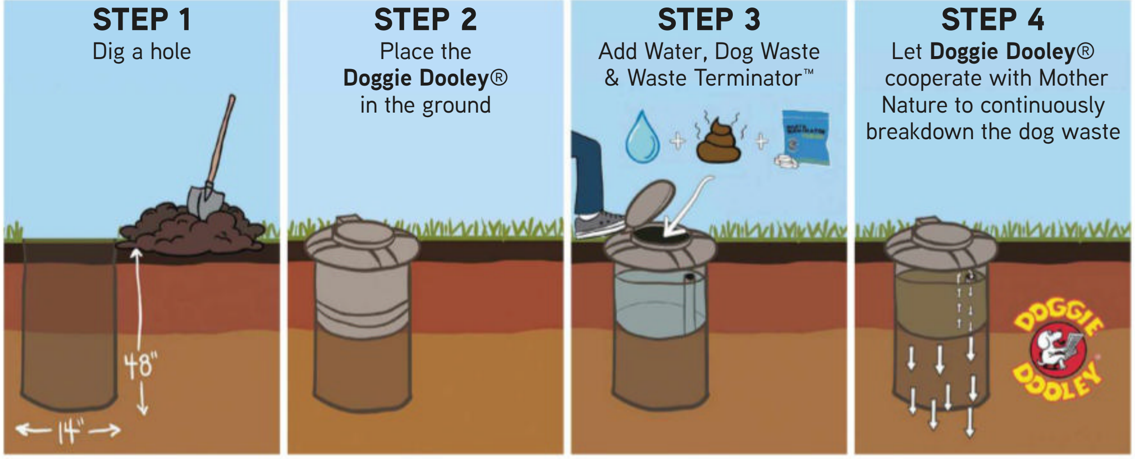
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14"
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STEP 3
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STEP 4
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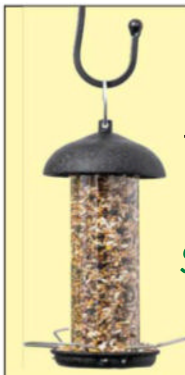

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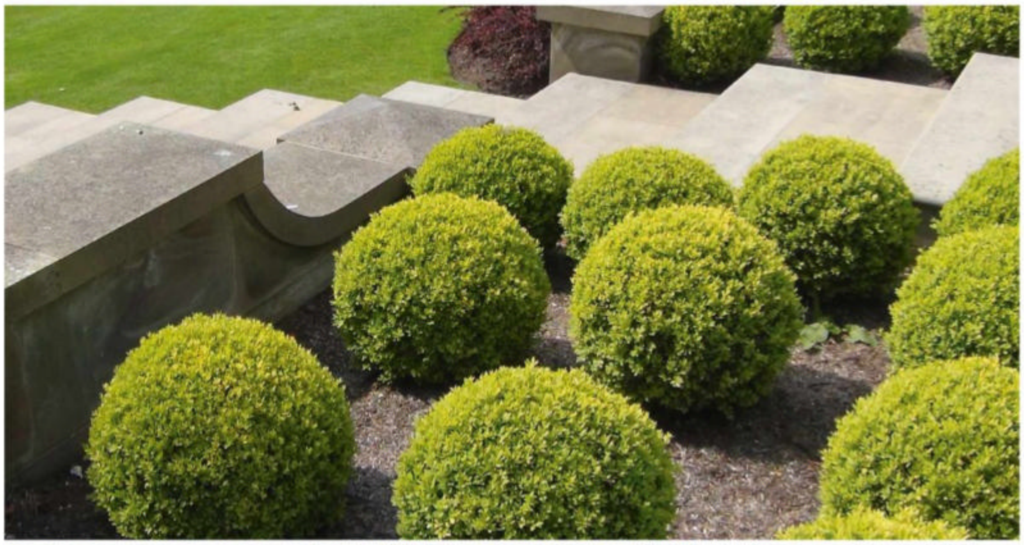

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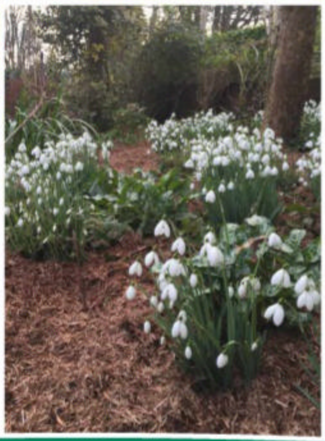

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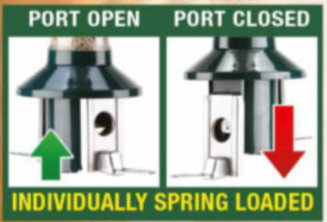

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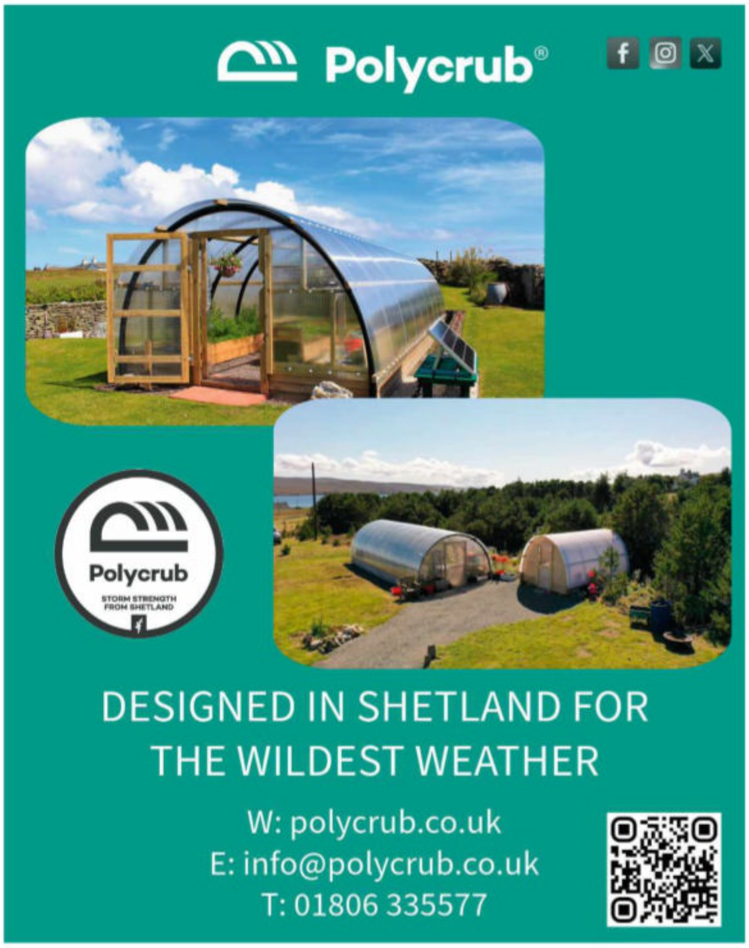
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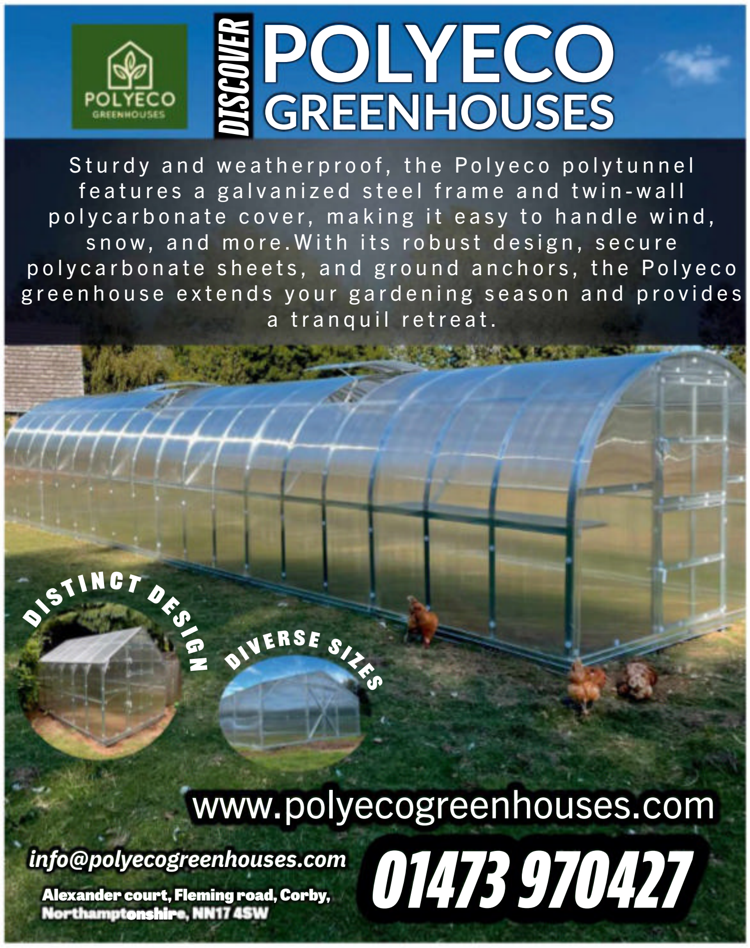
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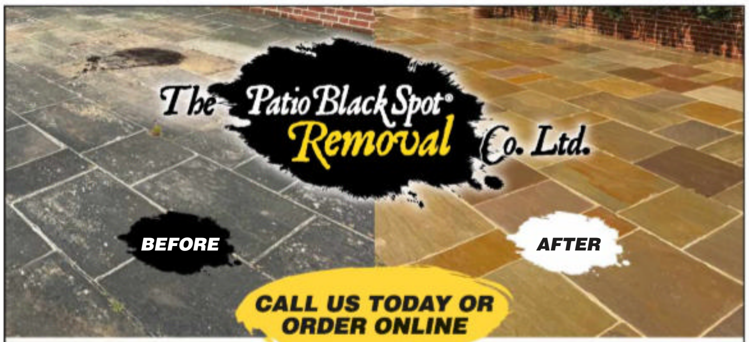

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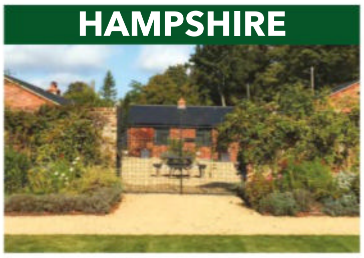

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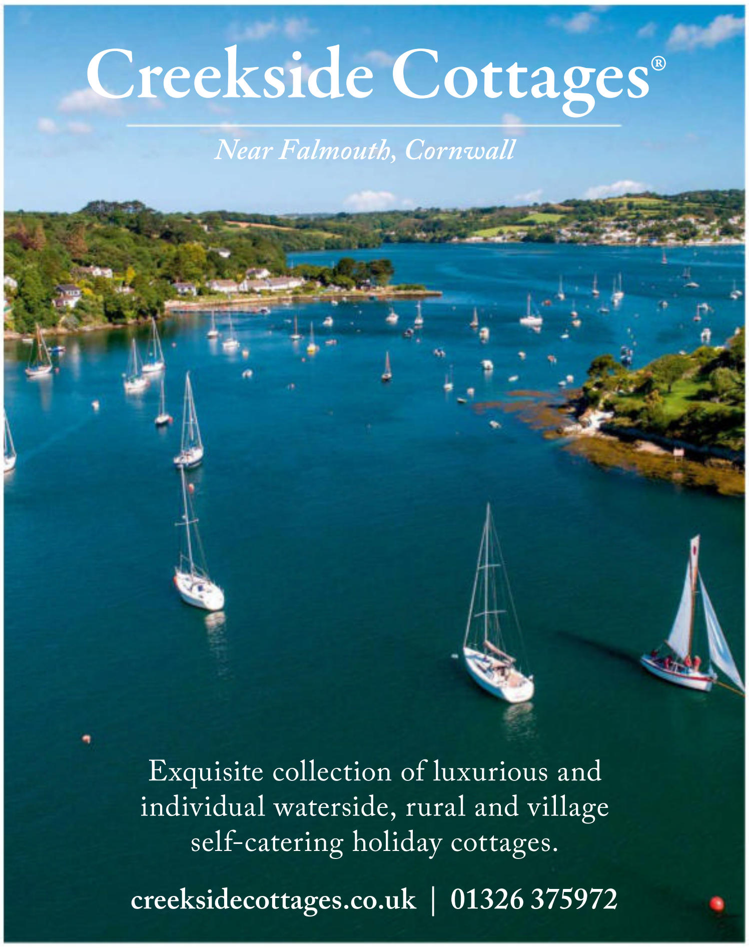
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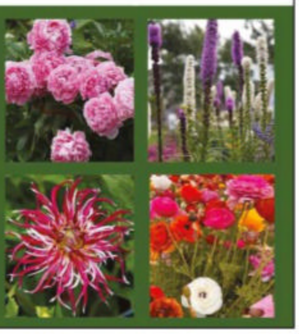

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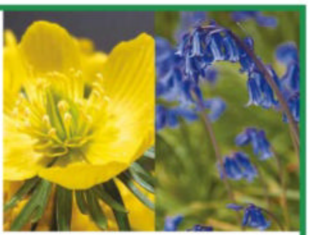

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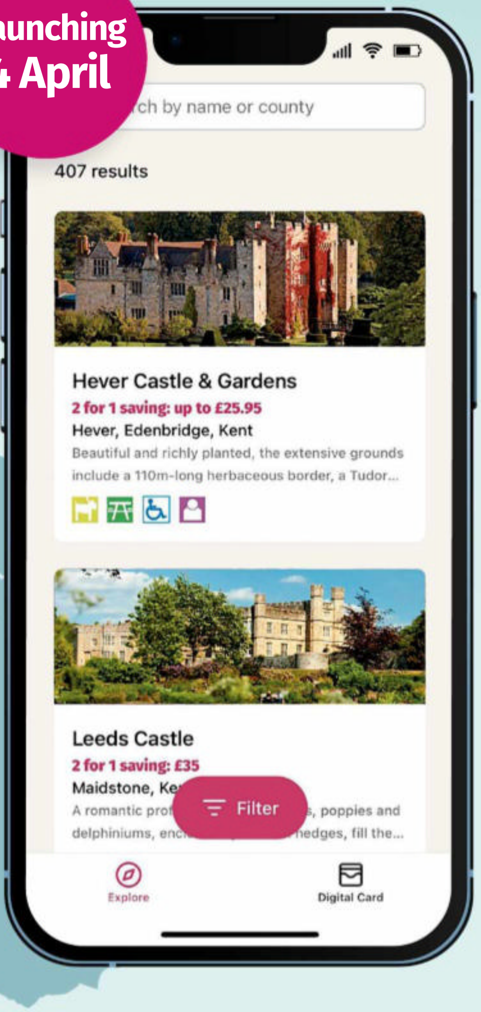
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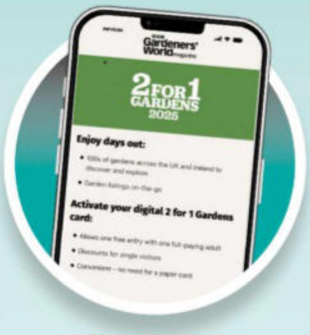
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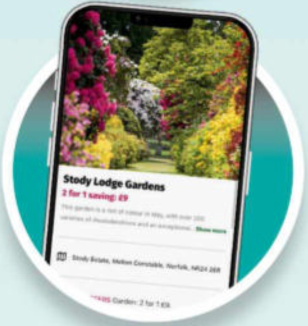
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Tales from Titchmarsh

Back at Kew in the 1960s, trainees' footwear options were sparse and far from comfy. Thank goodness for progress, says **Alan**

Greta Garbo, we are told, could not fully inhabit her roles unless her feet felt right. This had nothing to do with her quest for accuracy in terms of period detail, merely the fact that unless her pedal extremities were comfortable she found herself unable to concentrate on character portrayal. It amuses me to think that beneath the grand gowns she wore in *Queen Christina* her feet may have been clad in bedroom slippers.

I feel very much the same when I am gardening. No, I do not wear slippers, but unless my feet are warm, dry and comfortable, much of the pleasure of pottering about on my patch of earth is compromised.

So what to wear? Back in my days at Kew Gardens – in the late 1960s and early 1970s – we were offered, on our first day, a choice of footwear. It had to be picked up from Arthur in the stores. Arthur was a grey-moustachioed figure with a head of thick, silvery hair. A small but neatly turned out gentleman, he resembled a slighter version of Ronnie Barker in the sitcom *Open All Hours*, clad in a khaki coat and a crisply knotted tie.

Arthur would place on the counter in front of him two distinct kinds of footwear in the size you had previously indicated: a pair of sturdy black wellington boots and a pair of clogs. Now came decision time: which would you choose to begin your work at the world's leading botanic garden, bearing in mind that they would be your close companions for the next three years, or until they wore out and you had to provide your own replacement?

> "Now came decision time; which would you choose to begin your work at the world's top botanic garden: clogs or wellies?"

The lace-up clogs had rigid black leather uppers attached to thick wooden bases equipped on both sole and heel with what I can only describe as horseshoes. Some of the older students swore that they were as comfortable as a second skin. It was only when you had given in to such blandishments that you realised you were being taken for a ride.

The clogs were heavy and unyielding, and it was impossible to travel anywhere covertly – for a quick smoke behind the greenhouse or a visit to the somewhat primitive sanitary facilities – without giving an accurate and echoing indication of your whereabouts. The wise plumped for the wellies, but even these were of that robust kind that offered little in the way of creature comforts, and a walk became more of a gambolling shuffle.

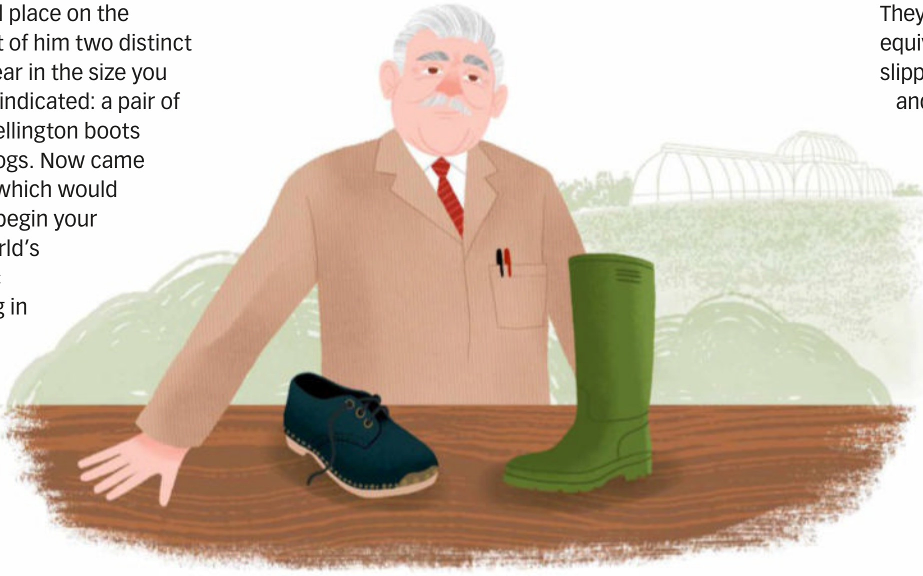
Such memories at least make me grateful for the advances in footwear technology we can enjoy today, though with such a wide choice available one must admit that it was at least simpler to choose between a clog and a welly under Arthur's watchful gaze.

I confess to being a lifelong welly man. Oh, I know that boots are sexier and wellies something that, in spite of their association with the Iron Duke, are regarded as fit only for toddlers or those impervious to the vicissitudes of fashion. But boots take ages to lace up and the right kind of wellies are supportive, warm and comfortable.

They were not always so. Arthur's – those big, black, blundering jobs with red rims – are all very well if you are doing nothing more than trotting out to the log shed or weeing the cockapoo, but spend an entire day in them and your feet will emerge looking and feeling like Cornish pasties. The green types are more fashionable, but with daily wear they still make your feet sweat and will wear out far more rapidly than a pair with neoprene lining – my discovery of which has been a revelation.

The rubber feels soft and flexible but is deceptively hard-wearing. The neoprene lining feels like a wetsuit, and keeps your feet and calves warm and dry. The buckles on the sides can be a bit of an irritation, but most folk leave them flapping – a sort of louche nod to fashion. They're not cheap, but in these equivalents of Greta Garbo's slippers I can garden all day in cold and wet weather, and emerge from my toil with feet free from moisture and un-fatigued by a day's gardening. As a tool of the trade, for me, they are matchless. Sorry Arthur...

Alan.



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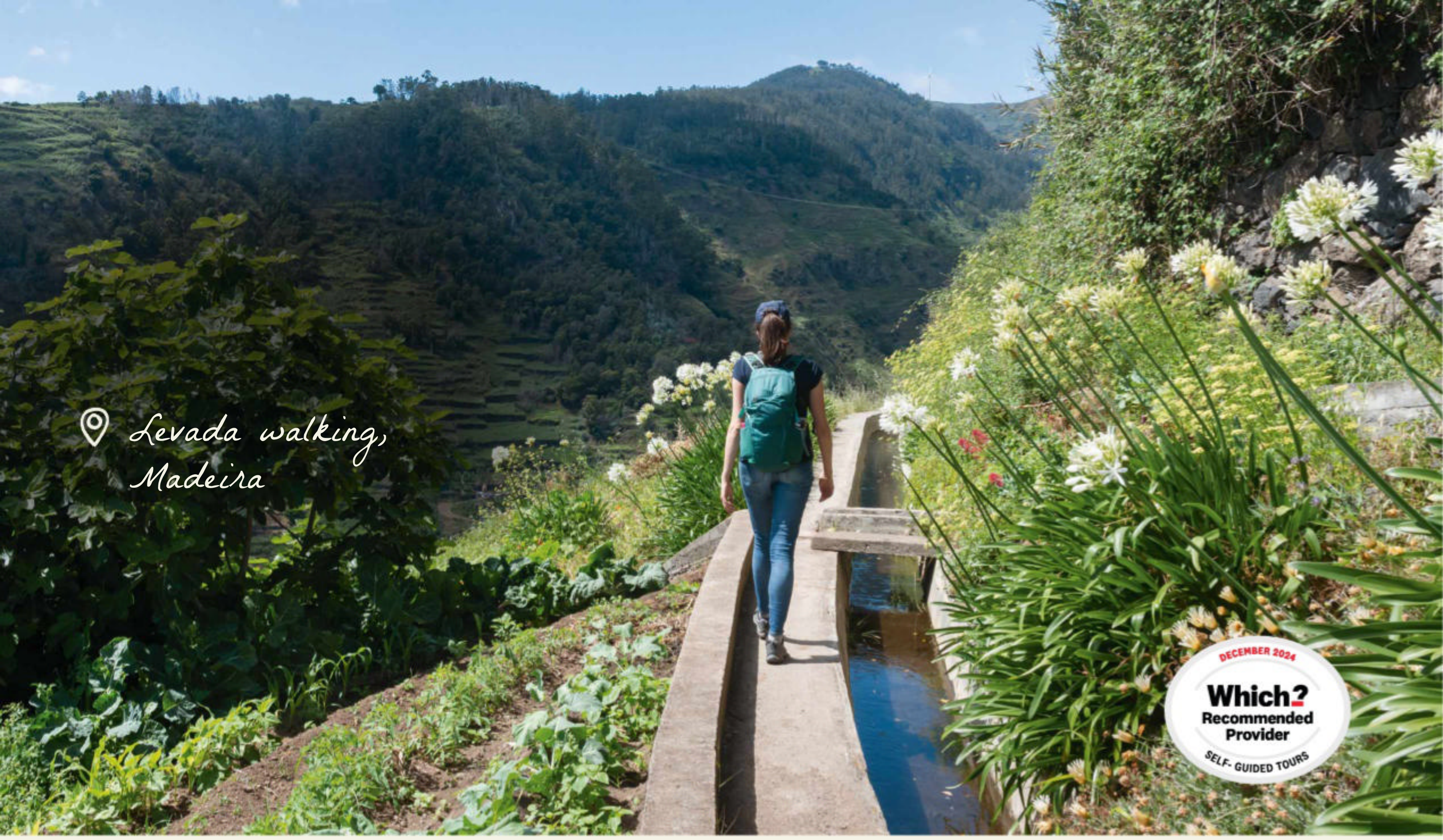

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